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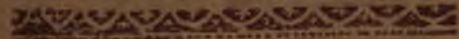


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LEVIN HOPKINS OF TOMPKINS CORNERS



BY IZORA CHANDLER



1. First American

2. Methodist churches

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and

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ELVIRA HOPKINS OF TOMPKIN'S CORNER

BY

IZORA CHANDLER

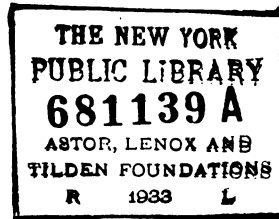
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LOVINGLY INSCRIBED
TO THE
DEAR "BONNIE LADDIE,"
WHOSE
PERSISTENT AND UNWAVERING FAITH
IN MY ABILITY TO DO,
HAS MADE
MANY THINGS POSSIBLE UNTO ME.
"MILLIE."

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ELVIRA HOPKINS OF TOMPKIN'S CORNER

CHAPTER I

Her Reasons for Writing

THE more I ponder onto it, the more curiouser it 'pears that there was ever a time when I thought I could get along without having no religion. But I did ; and mighty poor getting along it was, too.

The change come 'round 'long of my favorite niece, Ellen Maria's, going and marrying herself to that young minister, John Wesley Gray, and then, with her sweet voice—so like to her dear mother's—

'a-getting of my old heart all mellered up, till I was willing to go anywhere and do anything that her and her Saviour wanted me to.

I'm almost ashamed to say it, but I'd allers thought myself 'bout as good as most Christians, and, mebbe, a leetle better'n the generality of 'em. But my Ellen Maria,—well, if she'd met St. Peter, and a-looked into his face with them innocent eyes of hern, and had talked to him, gentle-like, he'd never a-turned ag'in his Lord on that black night.

So, it 'pears to me that religion 'dorter be wrote up by somebody what don't set up to be a critic; but who'll jest say—plain and frank—what she thinks about the hull subject. Somebody who—havin' got along without it, and then, having got to be interested into it' heart, soul and pocket-book—will tell of the good things with a sort of humble satersfaction, and who'll touch onto the faults of them what perfesses it in a lovin' sort of way—jest as

I'd a done to my children, if I hadn't a-been simply a maiden woman with nothing to do about children 'cept to tell other folks what d'orter be done with theirn.

I've been pondering onto this subject ever sence I had that long talk with Ellen Maria. There was siveral reasons why I begun pondering immediate. One of 'em was, that as soon as it 'come to be noised 'round that I was getting to be serious inclined—why! I can't begin to tell you how many folks got interested into my spiritual well-bein' at once.

The whole Presbyterian Church—'s you might say—called onto me; from the president of the sewing-circle clean on down through to the parson, hisself. Some said one thing: some said another: but they was all interested.

A few Baptists begun to feel an interest in me, likewise some Lutherans and Episcopalans and Congregationals. It was really extraordinary how much interest was woke up into the hull of Tompkin's

Corners jest because of my going to prayer-meeting 'long of Ellen Maria after we'd had our leetle talk.

If I hadn't a-looked after my own affairs and made up my mind for myself for years, I might a-got so sot up as to a-turned away from the church what took an interest into me when I was most needing it, and I might a-joined myself onto one what only got scairt about me when the danger was over.

Ellen Maria didn't take on. She only said: "Go just where you want to go, auntie, I know you'll be a Christian in any communion. I'd like to have you come with us because we need such as you, but I don't want to influence you."

She said a few other things in the same quiet way. I'm proud of her. She's a college graduate; but she talks just as simple and plain as I do, only she talks more correcter and a great deal sweeter and sunnier.

I began to look, kinder on the sly, into

John Wesley Gray's books and papers. And the more I looked, the more interested I got. Sometimes my eyes was so misty that wiping my spectacles didn't help at all. And swallowing didn't keep my heart down out of my throat as I went on a-reading of the brave men and women who planted the Church away out onto the borders.

Pretty soon I made my mind up, square and honest, that if I, who'd never done anything toward helping poor, suffering hearts to Jesus, could be took into a church with such a history, I'd better get in, immediate, and begin work.

Well, I done so, and I hain't sorry. And, 'cause, mebbe, some other folks may be going through the same experience, and, from having led a more sheltered life, they mayn't have such a russet and gnurly will as I who have fought my own battle for so many lonely years, I'm a-going to write it all out into a book—just as far as in me lies.

As much as Ellen Maria and John Wesley thinks of my judgment onto other matters, I'm sure they'd be worried to death if they knew what I was a-undertaking. They'd want to polish up my grammar till I wouldn't know what I was a-talking 'bout. Or, they might want to suggest a few particulars or kiver up some of the faults I shall tell of—and tell of just because I have got to love the Church by being interested into it heart, soul, and pocket-book, so much that I want to see it lift its beautiful white wings like a dove and fly up into clear air.

I want it to be so sweet and joyful that folks who hain't never paid no 'tention, will turn to look and to listen and after a-hearing of its gentle voice, they'll say: "'Pears like 'twould be sweet and comfortable-like to one's heart in there, and the hard things into my life would kinder get mellered up by such company; and the wickedness what has got into my life



could be dropped out of it if I was to begin praying about it."

I ain't no poet, and I ain't no picture-painter; but that's a describing of what I want my Church to be, and of what I, mostly, think it is. And I've been a-pondering onto the matter for quite a spell.

CHAPTER II

After Acknowledging the Receipt of a Note from the Publisher, she Begins to Discuss Church and Society Relations

I COME nigh onto stopping this book straight from the mark. Melviny Mellings—she's the literary woman of Tompkin's Corners, and I thought I'd talk the matter over with her on the sly,—she said that it was a powerful undertaking for a middle-age maiden woman what hain't never traveled outside of her own county, and who finished her education into a yellow schoolhouse on the ridge.

Melviny hain't been more'n fifty mile

over the county line herself, and she didn't go there but once. And she only got two quarters at a select school. But she's real peart, Melviny is, and she reads heaps of books and writes poetry and things like that.

She told me all about book printers and their carryings on. She said that nothing ever made a real first-class publisher so mad as to get a roll of mannyscrip' what shrowed, plain and earnest, that the writer of it was a genius. She showed me the letter that one of them wrote to her once, and I must say that it did seem to be a little sassy.

You see, she'd been sending him mannyscrip' after mannyscrip', any one of which would a made his fortune and hern in no time. And, after a-keeping of 'em for two or three months, he just kept right on a *not* printing of 'em but just a-sending of 'em back, with a little letter stating his thanks for the privilege of reading of 'em and such like nonsense.

Well, after several years, Melviny naturally got a little riled, and sot down and wrote him a letter asking what he meant by such conduct. And she hinted in pretty plain English, that it might be possible that he was a-making of his fortune by having her writings printed, 'way in Rooshy or Sibery, over his own signature.

She believes that she hit the truth or he wouldn't a-been so imperdent in his answering. But he didn't make anything by it, because she stopped a-sending of her writings to him immediate.

So, I begun to think of Melviny's experience, and I must confess that the thoughts was far from comforting. If Melviny couldn't get her things made up into books, when she'd wrote poetry for the *Tompkin's Corner News*, what would become of mine? Most any book-maker might think he had a right to set up and say what he wanted to print and what he didn't want to.

But, I just sent that first chapter off, on the sly, to a publishing man what had his name onto a good many of John Wesley Gray's books; and you'd a thought from the answer I got—it was short, bless you, 'twas awful short, and to the p'in't—but you'd a thought that this publishing man was just as interested about printing books that folks want to read as anybody else. And, if you'll believe me, he jest the same as owned up that he'd been pondering onto the subject of religion and the church and sich for some time back, hisself.

I spect that's what comes of my being natural when I write. If John Wesley, or Ellen Maria, or even Melviny Mellings had a-polished up that first chapter there wouldn't a been anything but the shine left; and nobody would a knowed what I was a-trying to get at.

I can't help feeling sorry, though, that the publishing man took such pains as to print all of his letter except his name,

18 Elvira Hopkins ot

which he just wrote. If he should ever feel called upon to write to me again, I hope he won't put himself out, for my eyes is real good, and I can read plain writing tolerable easy.

CHAPTER III

That Call from Mrs. Judge Bawcom

NOW, the one thing what stirred me up about joining myself onto a church was the respectability sum. (I want folks to have some idea as to what I'm writing onto; so I don't talk about solving no problems. That's college education talk. But in my schooldays we worked sums and we got ans'ers to 'em. We didn't get no solutions. If a *sum* was hard we worked hard. If 'twasn't, we didn't. And I hain't a bit ashamed to own up that the respectability sum is about the hardest thing I've tackled onto for quite a spell.)

What set the subject a-revolving into

my mind was that call from Mrs. Jedge Bawcom. Not that she hadn't never called onto me before, for she had. The Bawcoms and the Hopkinses has always been on visiting terms ; but because she's what you call ladylike ; and it's real pleasant to have her carriage stop before your door and to see her getting out, slow-like and stately—just as if nothing couldn't be done without her, but as if she wasn't going to hurry if it wasn't never done.

Well, she set right down into that there stuffed Boston rocker what always stands in the right-hand corner of the square parlor, 'longside of the window that's next to the elm outside. And she talked in her slow, elegant way about matters and things in general, till we come, somehow 'ruther, to speaking 'bout the different churches.

"Miss Hopkins," says she, "what's this I've hearn about your going off to the Methodist Church ? It's strange how

reports get strung about into which there ain't one grain of truth."

Now she didn't have any mean, sneaking sneer onto her face when she spoke that word, Methodist. She thinks altogether too much of herself to be found a-sneering at anything or anybody. But, if you'll believe me, there was a battery shock that run down my whole spinal column, and made me feel for about a minute as if I'd been caught a-doing something what didn't belong to the best Tompkin's Corners' manners.

But, after a breath or two, I begun feeling my temper a-rising, and I looked at her quite severe. But there she set, every inch a lady, who wouldn't be found trying to put down anybody—least of all a whole church—for the world. It was real fortunate that I didn't speak that first minute, for I should, a-most likely, been kinder worked up over it afterwards if I had.

"We're always counting onto you."

she went on, "as belonging to our particular company. There ain't many of the old families left, and we don't want to lose one out—'specially such a one as yours has been. Of course I hain't saying as there beant no good folks into that church." The galvanic battery took a-hold of my spinal column again. "Nobody wouldn't think of doubting their piety; but it don't seem likely to me, that a person with your tastes and bringing-up, Miss Hopkins, would feel very much to home with some of them."

There was a kind o' insinuating tone into her slow voice; and while she spoke it, she moved a little and the sunlight was ketched by the beads what was embroidered all over the front breadth of her dress, and throwed off into little sparkles onto the wall. And they danced and shook theirselves as if they was about tickled to death over the very idea. And she looked so real genteel and ladylike! And I remembered the old cheeny, and the

solid silver, and the 'ristocratic air of her whole house. Not that her own family was anything so very great; but that, having married herself to the Jedge, she took all o' them airs onto herself jest as natural-like as if she'd been a born Baw-com.

I begun to think that 'twas time for me to open my mouth. So, in as mild a tone as hern, I said that I wanted to be recognized because I was Elvira Hopkins, a respectable and comfortable-off maiden woman, and not jest because I tended one church 'stead of another. I told her that I could appreciate friends—regular-built friends—as well as anybody; but that I didn't want nobody a-sociating with me just 'cause I belonged to their communion and helped to bear the expenses of their church.

I told her that I never had been one of them kind what had to keep their respectability bolstered up by a parson and a passel of deacons; that I hadn't had

yet to be dragged into what a certain few might call "good society" by hanging on to a popular church.

Talking seemed to come easy after I'd got my mouth open. And I went on and told her that as to my not feeling to home with some of the Methodist folks, that I could name to her, right there, a number of Presbyterians and some Baptists and Congregationals, and a few Lutherans and Episcopalians, with whom I hadn't never been able to make myself feel to home.

The little sparkles on to the wall got mad, and danced up and down and shook their bright little fists at me. Though Mrs. Jedge Bawcom talked as mild as ever and she said with a sort of sigh: "I'm real surprised to hear you a-talking in such a fanatical manner, Miss Hopkins. I wouldn't a-believed it possible from one of your family. I shall still hope that we'll be friendly. But it ain't to be expected that we'll be likely to meet as often in the future as in the past."

Then she got up and pulled her long fur cloak up onto her sloping shoulders, and shook hands with me in the perlitest way possible : and, after a observation or two onto the weather, she went off. But she left me somewhat as a big steamer might cut loose from a little row-boat out onto the deep sea—jest cut right loose and sail off a-leaving of the little thing to take care of itself—if it could.

I was calm outside—perfectly calm and well-behaved ; but it wan't to be expected that I was a first-class saint away down out of sight.

I s'pose 'twas that very thing that done more toward making a Methodist out of me in a hurry than anything else. I mean the fact that she went a leetle too fur. 'Twas like using a spur onto a mettle-some beast, with me. Though I can see how it might a wilted some folks like cut clover under a August sun.

I jest said to myself, I did : "Elvira, Hopkins, ef you've got one spark of re-

spectability or old family name or anything else that's worth having, you just go and put 'em where they'll do the most good. And where some folks, who ain't certain sure of the genuineness of theirs, feel kinder feard of putting 'em to the test. Maybe there's a work for your old hands to do yet in this shilly-shally world. You hain't never been called a shirk yet, and I wouldn't begin at this time of life, if I was you."

My bonnet and shawl was on in a jiffy. It wan't no time before John Wesley Gray was a-writing my name down as a probationer into his church. Ellen Maria kissed me onto both of my old cheeks.

"You blessed Auntie," says she. "You're going to be a Methodist, are you? Well, I know what that means. It's heart, soul, and pocketbook."

"Yes," says I. "And it's respectability and the old fambly name thrown in, 'longside o' the rest."

They both stared, but I didn't let on.



It wouldn't a been best to a let on. Afterward, I set down with my niece in the little setting-room to have a little visit, and as we set there with the door of the study ajar, I could see that the young minister rested his head onto his hands a good deal; that he 'peared like a man what was a-carrying burdens so heavy as not to be good for him.

"My dear, what is the matter of John Wesley," I inquired. "Is his sermon work too heavy for him?"

Then Ellen Maria, she sighed real hard. And she begun to seem very much interested into something what was going on outside the window. I've a sneaking sort o' suspicion that 'twas to hide the look that come over her face, so's I shouldn't get onto it. For, seeing as she's all I have in the world, she knows how close she's watched by a pair of loving old eyes.

So she just said: "Oh, no! he loves nothing better'n his pulpit preparation. He's just had a call from the young

Eldredges and the Wrights. They came to ask for their church letters." She leaned forward as if things was getting very interesting out of the window. "They say we've no society in our church, and that it would be pleasanter to be united in church interests with the same ones who are their associates in other matters. So, they are going to join the Presbyterians."

I was surprised. Grandfather Eldredge was one of the oldest members of the Methodist church. And Jonathan Wright had been a class-leader for up'ards of forty year.

"If we don't have any society in our church," said Ellen Maria with a little tremble into her voice that took right a-hold of my heart-strings, "it's because we won't have it. Methodists who have as much money as other people, and more, too, don't have lovely little parties for their young people. So, if the young ones want to have good times, they must go

into the homes of members of other churches who are willing to be to some little trouble and expense for the sake of seeing young people happy.

"So, we haven't many left beside old people and children, and the constant fear is that as soon as the children grow up they'll leave us, too. It's a sorry looking future for a church with the broadest, sweetest creed under the sun."

I didn't have anything to say that would really touch the p'int; so I jest took her face between my hands and said:

"Well, good-by, dearie. Let's hope that things'll all come 'round right after a spell." Then I went home and set right down and begun to ponder. Seems to me that I'm having a deal of pondering to do lately.

CHAPTER IV

She Argues the Case, somewhat,
of the Church for the Young
as well as the Young for the
Church

WELL, I went home, as I said, and set down to ponder onto the subject that seemed to be a-bothering the life out of John Wesley Gray! After a while I jest made my mind up. Then I had my little brown horse hitched onto the low buggy, and I drove round and invited every one of the older members of the Methodist Church to my house for an early tea on Wednesday afternoon.

I told them that, insomuch as my name had been put onto the church roll, I wanted to have a little celebration of my

own. And I added, moreover, that if any body staid away I should feel very specially grieved.

The next morning Martha Ann—she's the woman what has lived with me as a sort of housekeeper and general friend for so many years that we've got to think pretty much alike—well, she and I set to work a-preparing for my company. Our family was always called good perviders, and I just laid myself out this time. Martha Ann and I didn't leave no stone unturned.

On Wednesday my visitors come. You should a-seen the buggies unloading at that front gate. We had a old-fashioned tea and a good old-fashioned visit.

Everybody seemed happy. They talked and laughed and told stories of the pranks they cut in their younger days and proved to me, then and there, that Methodists are as good company as anybody needs hanker after.

And I said, out loud enough for 'em

all to hear, that I wished the young folks of the church had been invited, 'cause I knew they'd a-liked to a-heard the stories about ole-time doings.

It was an unfortunate remark. Grandfather Eldredge drew down his face and said that our Church didn't have hardly any young folks, these days; they was too light an' triffin' to be Methodists.

He said as how that he'd labored and labored with his grandchildren; but that nothin' couldn't keep 'em. They'd all gone off into other churches. Then some others took it upon themselves to join in with the same kind of remarks, and my party was fast turning into a funeral.

But I didn't care. I'd invited them for this pertickerler thing. So I just plucked up courage and said, says I:

" Well, if we " (strange how easy 'twas to go to counting on myself as one of 'em)—" if we hain't got the knack of keeping young folks with us ain't *we* to blame 'stid o' *them*? Young folks is like

bees. They're allers hummin' 'round wherever there's sunshine an' sweets. I've been a-ponderin' onto this thing pretty strong. And I've come to the conclusion that the reason why we're a-losin' our young folks is, 'cause we make too much of Heaven an' too little of Here. Now eternity ain't good, as a stiddy diet, for strong, healthy, happy young hearts."

Horried looks spread like quick thunder clouds over 'most all of the faces. But I saw a wonderful light rising into the one I love best in the world. It shone out till it reflected onto that other face that had been bowed over the desk into the little study. And, somehow, I plucked up courage to go on.

"Be kinder patient long o' me," I said, "'cause I've just got myself into the Church, and it's so sweet an' shelt'rin' a feelin' to me, that I just want to be a gettin' every livin' soul, young an' ole, to try it for their own selves. But we must be mighty keerful. We must show

that we're a-living into this present world and a working for it—reasonable-like—if we want to persuade folks to join us in huntin' arter a better one.

“We must have charity that's softer than swan's-down; an' we must be careful and not call sunny-hearted youngsters light and triffin' if they do hanker arter somethin' a trifle more exciting than a prayer-meeting. Jest let's give 'em some parties—the right kind, of course—and then go in and help 'em to get a good time out of 'em. We take dancing away from them and give 'em a class-meeting. We won't let 'em play cards; but we think we're doing mighty fine things for 'em when we let 'em work themselves nigh about to death to a church social.

“We hain't got no business to make them help raise the church expenses what we'd orter put our hands into our pockets for. Most of us know what a hilarious thing and one to be desired and longed for, the general run of church socials is.”

Then Mrs. Bemis begun to get riled. 'Twas jest a leetle too much for her. "Ef young folks had the love of Christ into their hearts it ud take all desires arter carnal things out of 'em—and that without no mincin' of matters," says she.

"But we'd orter be careful," I said again, very tender-like, "and let the influences of our holy Religion drop onto their young lives as soft as the sweet spring showers come down; when the buds begin to blow and the little birds go out and spread and flutter their pretty wings so as to get all they can of it, and duck their little heads into it when it's a-comin down, we mustn't drownd 'em out with a thunder-shower, what drenches everything, and breaks all the tender branches, and beats down the little posies that would so much ruther look up and smile.

"A twelve-year-old boy hain't onto the road to perdition 'cause he wants to see the fireworks on a Fourth o' July evenin'

stid o' goin' to class-meetin'! Ef any thing riles me all up it's to hear a woman of sixty year, weighin' nigh onto two hunderd pound, and what's got rheumatiz beside, a-tellin' how thankful she is that the desire to dance has been taken out of her heart!"

Some of them laughed at this little shot, which done more towards setting matters right than you'd imagine. A good hearty laugh, or a smile what goes rippling along across first one face and then another, will do more toward smoothing things up than a sermon, any day.

So, the first thing we knew, we was really planning to do something. Our young minister and his wife—my niece, Ellen Maria—said they'd give out invitations for everybody to call onto them Monday afternoons and evenings. They said they'd have chocolate, or tea, or coffee—something easy done and not too much costing—to hand about, and they'd

do all that they could with books and pictures and, may be, a little music to give the folks—young and old—a happy time.

“ And we want all of you to come in,” said Ellen Maria with her face all pink and pretty. “ Don’t let the young folks think that you don’t like to have them ’round. Ask ’em to come with you, and you’ll soon see how the line between the old and the young will fade away. You’ll grow so young, yourselves, and they’ll be such charming company, that the millennium will come, in one church at least.”

Everybody loves Ellen Maria. Her mother wasn’t a bit like me. So she’s already got a strong hold onto their ’fections. And whatever she seems to set her heart onto, they feel willing to, at least, give a trial to.

There was more talking and planning—heaps of it, and everything seemed to be harmonious-like when we said good-

night to one another, and I was left to sit down afore the old fireplace in the back parlor and to ponder onto what was best for me to do—a plain, ornery maiden-woman living lone and lonely—toward helping the Methodist Church of Tompkin's Corners to keep its young folks from slipping out of its arms.

CHAPTER V

She Begins to Try to Live out
some of the Results of her
Pondering

THERE was a pretty long train of results that hitched themselves onto my ponderings after the Party. I didn't undertake to argufy the point, I just went to living it out as fast as possible. Perhaps I was taking a good deal onto myself; but want meant that way.

That night, after my visitors had gone I looked all round my house—into every room. And I tried to make my eyes anywhere from sixteen to twenty year old 'stid of—there, I almost let out my age! And I couldn't keep from seeing that, while things was altogether clean and com-

fortable they *was* what you might say, stiff. Black horse-hair furniture must have been first invented for funerals and prisons, and got mixed in their directions and landed into folkses real living-rooms. There was a sort of halo hoverin' round some straight-backed chairs that come under my gaze ; but, in all my last years, I couldn't remember as how that a young person had ever chose one of them stiff, hearse-like looking things to set onto when they'd come in to see me.

The end of that severe glancing 'round was that, instead of using the money that had just been paid in onto one mortgage in buying of another, I went and told Martha Ann to get ready and go with Ellen Maria and me to the city for a day's trading.

We had a powerful good time. Arter I got that first hundred dollars fairly broke into, my selfishness seemed to get ashamed of itself. It was something real remarkable how them bills slipped through

my fingers, and how I come to enjoy a-letting of em go.

"Auntie acts like a lover preparing a home for his bride," said Ellen Maria with a little laugh.

Then I took to it and scolded her for letting me go on so pokey-like during all of her young days. But she said that I kept her away at school so much that any place would have looked beautiful that could be called home.

We went to a real fashionable place for dinner, and I bought the best things on the list. Then I got Martha Ann a new black silk gown, and told her not to keep it a-hanging into her clothes-press, but to wear it—for there was more where that come from, and I bought Ellen Maria a imported thing—very delicate and just the color of her hair and one or two others. And a few necessary articles was tacked onto my own wearing apparel.

We went home tired; but we was happy. I'd never spent so much money into my

whole life. Everything was 'bout the same as when the property come into my hands ; and while I ain't so pesky rich as some folks seem to think I be, 'twas time that things should be furbished up a little.

For a day or two we jest had to set 'round waiting for them things to come. I got to be real kinder restless a-waitin'so long.

But, when they did come, you can reckon that we was kept pretty lively. There was easy chairs—regular-built sleepy-hollows—to be stowed away into corners, and some pretty willows that had to have bright ribbons run into them and tied into loose bows. It was beautiful to see what the fingers of that niece of mine could do. The new curtains made everything look soft and graceful, and the pictures——

It was real extravagant to buy them two pictures at that price. But when the days is dreary, a look at that soft landscape by Mr. Inness is good for tired eyes ;

and Ellen Maria said that so good a copy of that particular Madonna and Child would have been cheap at double the money. My own opinion is worth a good deal more about tomato ketchup than about Madonnas; but my heart grew wonderfully tender when I looked into them serious eyes.

There'd a-been trouble into the choir, and the singing was enough to drive a body distracted. John Wesley Gray, the pastor, had said oncet in my hearing that if he was rich, he'd get a fust-class musicianer man to come and train the young people, and then to come to the Sunday meetings and stand up and lead the hull congregation by beating a stick—I disremember now, jest what he called them kind of musicianer men.

There wasn't no such to be had in all Tompkin's Corners. Mr. McCheen, who was best, had been hired to play the organ into the Episcopal Church; and Mr. Noyes, who could do it pretty well, was

a Presbyterian and had to work into their choir. But I hadn't made all my plans for nothing. I just spunked right up and had John Wesley write up to the city and get a real, regular-built perfessor of music to come to Tompkin's Corners and train our young folks every Saturday night, and then to just come right to my house in my best spare chamber over Sunday, so as to lead the singing of the preaching meetings and the Sunday-school.

The new Steinway piano that Ellen Maria picked out that day we went into the city, was standing into my big back parlor. I'd made up my mind to have a set of good, jolly, old-fashioned singing-schools to my own house every Saturday night; and to wind each one up with some good eating things to pass 'round, and a happy social time.

So, Martha Ann, she brought out the fambly linen—what was most as old as I was, and she dusted the mulberry cheeny

that was my mother's wedding-present, and both on us rubbed up the silver. And while we was a-doing of all these things, our hum-drum old life got "choked so full"—as Martha Ann said—that it was as sweet as a life on earth can possibly be to a body who has seen so many years a-goin' by.

And while we was a-working, I felt so kind of chipper that, though I can't carry a tune—not if it was to save my life—if you'll believe me, I'd catch myself humming onto some of them prayer-meeting tunes. 'The one that staid into my mind the closest was,

"One more day's work for Jesus."

Then I just had to stop and laugh at myself for going round a-singing like any young thing who was getting ready for her first party. But, sure's you're living, 'twouldn't be no time before I'd find myself singing away :

"Lord, if I may,
I'll work another day."

Then things would kinder grow misty and gray afore my eyes, and there wouldn't be nothing left for me to do but to wipe 'em off with a corner of my checkered apron and say :

"Well, Elvira Hopkins, if you be a-making a fool of yourself, and I really think you be, you must confess to its being a very pleasant and agreeable feeling."

I think that, some way, all the pent-up love of my old heart just went and poured itself out like a river. Having been shut up for so long, with only Ellen Maria to coddle, it seemed as if I must take the whole passel of young folks in. And what a merry company they be !

I won't trouble to tell you about how that first nor second, nor any of the Saturday evenings at my house went off ; nor how the young ones have got to kinder dropping in onto me, a-most any time o' day or evening, with their plans and their frolics. It's a-getting so that they lead



me a pretty crazy life, I can tell you, with their secrets and their lovers' quarrels to be straightened out.

It was only a quarrel, such a mite of a one, that wrecked my own life and flung it up onto cold and barren rock! And, with their wanting to be better Christians and to do things for Christ,—why, they don't give me time to get into my old shut-up ways—not even if I wanted to.

It's queer, but the Eldridge young folks, and the Wrights have come back again. Mrs. Bemis says they are arter the loaves and fishes—that they want the training of that city professor. But, suppose they do? Loaves and fishes ain't worth nothing if they don't get *et* at the right time. We've got just as good a right to win by music as the vile places have, and a good deal more; for music was born in Heaven when the stars sung together that morning. And its very being is to bless.

But we've got the best singing into our church that's going anywhere in Tomp-

kin's Corners now. The city music-man leads, the youngsters are scattered all over the church, and Martha Ann says, "It's a sight to hear that singing!"

CHAPTER VI

She Quotes from a Sermon
Preached by Ellen Maria's
Husband

QUITE a change has come into some of the homes of our Church—not into all of them, bless you! There is them as would complain of the angel Gabriel. John Wesley preached a sermon that was a word in the nick of time. He said that if we were watching the younger members of the flock we might feel sure that their keener eyes have not looked less closely at us. He asked what we had done to win their love for the Church of our choice, and their love for ourselves as members of that Church. Our words to them have been a constant *Do not this* and *that* but

we haven't troubled ourselves to find out any pleasant thing for them to enjoy, and then go and invite them to enjoy it. If we believe that certain things do not aid to spirituality, then we are our brother's keeper, in so far that we should help him to something that will entertain without harming him, and interest without lowering the high plane of social intercourse.

This seems kind o' high-fa-lutin' writing for my goose-quill: but I borrowed the sermon so as to make it read real imposing-like.

He said, into that sermon, that we sit calmly by and let others rule the social world; and, by and by, when our young folks drift away from us, we hold up our hands in shocked amazement at what was the most natural thing in the world.

"It is as much our duty," said John Wesley Gray in that sermon, "to make people innocently happy as to pray with them. Indeed it would be a good deal easier to pray for some one whose life we have

brightened or sweetened. It is not right to sigh over the evils of society and make no effort to change them. How many of our established church-members make an effort to become acquainted with and to encourage the younger ones ; to let them feel that their presence is appreciated at a service or, in a gentle way, that their absence is felt.

“ To be sure it's the duty of every one to work, whether he's appreciated or not. But Duty is a hard task-master. Who of us does not often shirk ?

“ There is no reason why, with proper conditions, we should not have our proportion of the intelligent, cultured young people in every hamlet, village and city in the land. But we must look sharply after the conditions.

“ We are a strangely unappreciative church at times. We do not like to flatter people. If we see that one is inclined to a little innocent self-appreciation, instead of gratifying human nature, and at the

same time turning latent energy into the right channel, we snub him. We wouldn't give him a pleasant office, or an honor, for anything in the world. We expect him to be a saint, while our own hearts keep a little corner for envy and jealousy.

" 'In honor preferring one another.' I would go a long way to see the faithful old Sunday-school superintendent, or the class-leader, who had sincerely, and with cheerfulness, offered his resignation in favor of some bright young member and, afterward, continued to throw all his energies toward making the new man a success. It would be worth a pilgrimage to clasp the hand of such a man! "

It was a risky thing for a young preacher to say. But he didn't do it like a scold. I saw some of the folks nodding their heads to each other, and talking, when meeting was over. Some of 'em said that, being as they wasn't millionaires, they wasn't up to giving "high teas" and the other new-fangled way of doing things.

But some of 'em was willing to give the matter a trial. They had, first, a real old-fashioned quilting bee, and the one who give it found out that real heart hospitality can charm even those who are used to the most fashionerable Tompkin's Corners society.

One of the class-leaders had a literary society in which one hour was given to facts and one to fun. And, every meeting they took fifteen minutes of the first hour to study up the history of Methodism. And you'd a-been real surprised to know how very interested we all got, and how much just this one church has done for history, liberty, and the general uplifting of folks everywhere. Why, we got to loving it as if it was something to be proud on. We begun to realize that we was honored in belonging to it.

Old Mr. Beers cut down two favor-*ite* fruit trees when the warm weather come, and laid out a tennis-court onto his lawn, and invited players to come and enjoy it.

Old Mrs. Martin started the pretty old game of battledore and shuttlecock. You'd be astonished to find how many ways was got up to make life look bright to young eyes that hadn't seen too much sorrow.

And them what done these new pranks was showed so much respect and love by them as they was trying to please, that their own lives grew younger every day. As for me, why, I tálked so much about the young folks that smiles begun going 'round whenever I begun it. Martha Ann said to me one morning :

"You was always real *spry*, Miss Hopkins. But I do believe you're gittin' twenty year younger,—in your face, in your voice, your eyes an' your smile. You 'pear to be *gladder* than you're use to bein'."

I've dwelt onto the pleasant side because it was pleasant to do it. But, possible, I'd better give a peep onto the other, least some as reads this book and tries to

work in the same spirit, may get discouraged. If anybody is fool enough to think that, just because he is trying to do right, he'll find plain sailing, he's greatly mistaken, that's all.

First of all, our young minister got himself into immejit trouble with that sermon. Old Mr. Wisner, who's been class-leader ever since I can remember, didn't come nigh a meeting. When his pastor called onto him, he said that old folks wasn't of no 'count, 'cept to be kicked to one side, nowadays. That it use to be different in his younger days; but that the church was being "run" by a lot of boys and girls; and that the solid members 'ud best lay back and jest see where they'd bring up. Josiah Wisner is a man double the age of his young minister. And the help 'ud orter a come from the other side.

John Wesley didn't say anything to me; but he must a-found it pretty stiff work a-trying to win a man back what showed

sech a spirit. But he brung it about, somehow, though it took a deal of struggle.

This and some other things set me to pondering. I've arriv to the conclusion that while some Episcopals seem to magnify their love for the church too much, some Methodists love their own selves too much, and are not willing to do big things, *or little ones*, for the church's own sake. They only do things to please their own selves.

Jest give a man some public thing to do that he likes, and ministers may come and ministers may go, but that man will hold on with a death grip—even if it ain't no more than passing the collection basket. He's like a Canada thistle ; once get him into a place and it's a life-and-death struggle to get him out.

This doesn't seem to be a pleasant spirit in which to write, so I'll stop my book for the present.

CHAPTER VII

In Which She Relates Some of Martha Ann's Sayings

ELLEN MARIA said, says she to me the other day : " Auntie, John and I have thought that some bright newspaper man might win fame and perhaps money by writing what you've been doing and saying." She laughed when she said it. 'Twas a sort of joke.

But I said, " Well, *I* don't want any newspaper money, and I don't have any pertickerler use for fame, either. It'll last just as long as you tickle folkses fancies ; and when you begin to show that you've a mind of your own, you must look out. Fame may be a very beautiful damsel for a young poet what

is filled full of longings; but she ain't no kind of company for a respectable maiden woman to keep, what's got property that pays a stiddy income."

Well, after a hull week of pondering, I've come to the opinion that no harm will be done and, possible, some good may come by writing out some of the things said *to* me and *about* me and them particular young people. Mrs. Bemis didn't believe in "caterin' to youngfolks." Perhaps she ain't so much to blame, for her sister, Mrs. Butterworth, is a Free Methodist and is continually harping on worldliness into the Church.

Well, them two felt it to be their bounden duty to come and labor with me. I wasn't to home and they was unwise enough to begin onto Martha Ann. Says Mrs. Butterworth, says she:

"Ef religion is goin' to make folks so kind o' light an' triffin' as you an' Miss Hopkins is a-gettin' to be, an so bent on carnal pleasures, why, I can't recommend

it no more to a dyin' world. You an' she are a-makin' of them young folks so gay, and vain, and frivolous that it makes my heart bleed over the waste places of Zion. Probable you don't realize, but it's only Satan a-deckin' himself out like a angel of light. A few of us is a tryin' to get folks out of the world into the Church; but Miss Hopkins is a-bringin' of the world right into the Church with her carryings on."

Martha Ann said that she thought, in a minute, of that prayer that always sets my heart to throbbing: "Father, I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from the evil." But she didn't mention it because she verily believes yet, that there is such a thing as casting pearls afore swine.

So she just said some words of her own that sounded almost like poetry when she tole 'em over to me. I didn't know that there was so much into Martha Ann.

But she asked them women what they supposed the Lord, hisself, would think of a girl what He'd made with a forehead like a lily and cheeks like a pink ; with hair like summer dusk, and eyes runnin' over with sweetness—what would He think of her if she didn't wear pretty clothes, not vain-like nor puffed up, as they might say—but with an innocent joy in bein' something that's pleasant for world-weary old eyes to turn theirselves onto.

She told them that young folks was just livin' an' walkin' posies ; and that she liked to see the old house bright with them and echoing with their pretty voices. She told them that, maybe, Miss Hopkins and all the young folks was on their way to perdition, and that them two and their cronies was the kind of stuff Heaven would be made up of ; but that 'twould take somebody else to make her believe it.

I was quite shocked when she told me

this but she, lowed that I'd best wait till I'd heard the rest, before saying too much.

It seems that these women went on to say that there'd best be only three people in the church, and them three *perfect*, than to have it crowded full of pride and vanity.

Then Martha Ann felt that the time had come when she could quote Scripture. She told them that St. Paul had advised us to set our faces toward the mark, but that he didn't say anything about our letting on that we thought we'd got there. Paul, hisself, 'lowed that he wan't perfect; but that he was a-“ following after.” And she didn't think it was a pertickeler modest thing to set a body's self up over St. Paul.

She said that taking off from other folkses piety never hadn't been knowed to add any onto a body's self, and, as for the Church, it wan't no great, cold, white individooality set up for us to fall down

before, as ef 'twas a Hindoo idol. The Church is ourselves—each other. And Christ said: "Little children, *love* one another." He didn't say: "Pick one another to pieces."

"Mis' Butterworth," says Martha Ann, "you call yourself a Free Methodist, an' so fur as I kin see, that simply means that you're free to find fault with the members of the old church you've left."

Then they thought they would go home. Mrs. Butterworth said: "We didn't come here to talk to *you*. Will you jest tell Miss Hopkins, *fur me*, that she'd a great deal better be havin' prayer-meetings over the immortal souls of these young folks every Saturday night, than to be a-filling of their heads with all sorts of vanities. She is a-lovin' on 'em in a weak, carnal way; and carin' for their bodies instid of feelin' anxious over their souls."

Then Martha Ann lost all of her religion for a short spell. And she said

that it would be a good deal better for some folks that she knew on, if they'd jest let their souls and other folkses souls rest for a spell, and go to feedin' the hungry, an' smilin' into the eyes of them that weep, an' speakin' bright an' sunshiny to them what had lost out of their hearin' the dearest voices on earth.

"The trouble with you is," says she, "that you've been fussing 'round over your soul till you've got it into a morbid state—like a baby what's cuddled to death, and waked up every little while to see ef it's asleep. You are tryin' your soul to see how it feels, each pertickerler minute. Sometimes, you go ravin' distracted tryin' to get it blessed so 't you kin work fur th' Lord; when all that you or anybody else has to do, is to take hold of the nighest thing that 'dorter be done, and simply do it as well as you can, with the help of the Lord."

I felt it to be my duty to look very severe when Martha Ann repeated that

conversation. But I couldn't get her to own up that she'd oughtn't to a-said it. She just told me that a religion was fust-class that made fust-class men and women; and that she hadn't one bit of patience with a religion that made folks cantankerous. She said they was better off without it. That 'twasn't Jesus they'd got, 'twas *somebody* else! Then she went and left me.

No, things ain't easy: but I've made up my mind to keep up courage and go ahead.

The first thing I did the next afternoon was to make a neighborly call onto Mrs. Bemis. I knew that she thought I'd come to answer back about her call onto me of the day previous; for she greeted me very stiff, and settled her mouth as if she'd made all up what she was going to say.

But I didn't give her no chance, I talked about the commonest things, until the look onto her face faded into her natural expression. Then, as I got up to



go, I asked her to come over and help me mother all those young folks next Saturday evening. That I was certain, from her having had children of her own, that she could teach me some excellent lessons, and that I'd been thinking of asking some one about my own age to come and help me.

I seen in a minute that she thought Martha Ann hadn't told me a word. And a relieved and comforted look came over her. She held back a good deal; but I said I should expect her.

And, if you'll believe me, when Saturday night come, she come too. I was real glad, but Martha Ann, she couldn't speak for amazement.

'Twasn't long 'fore some of the most talkative ones was close up to her. Nellie Ray's long braid was loosened at the end, and she asked Mrs. Bemis to finish it out for her, 'cause she didn't know how to braid in four strands.

Mrs. Bemis just took a hold, like a

fancy hair-dresser. She patted and smoothed it, and said that she liked to see hair done that way, for she used to do her little daughter's so ; and it was just the color of this, when she died.

The next thing I knew, Nellie had one arm around Mrs. Bemis' neck and was kissing her and wiping her eyes with a pretty lace handkercher. I stole away jest 's ef I hadn't seen it. But, taking hold of that shiny hair, was better for her than a dozen talkings to.

CHAPTER VIII

In Which She Tells of her First
Visit to an Annual Confer-
ence and an Interview with
the Bishop.

ELLEN MARIA and I have been to Conference. I wa'n't much set on going; but she said I must know something about the machinery that run our Church. So we went up for two or three days. John Wesley met us at the train and, when we was safe into the omnibus, he let fall that he was stopping with a Episcopal fambly.

I asked him how that come about, and he said that hospitable members of other churches opened their homes at such times, as the members of the church

where the conference was held could not entertain so many.

I wondered why ministers didn't go to a respectable tavern or boarding-house and pay for their own keep, like respectable men. I forgot, for the minute, that John Wesley was one of 'em, but when the color flamed into his face, I felt like apologizing.

Ellen Maria's gentle voice came to the rescue. She said that many of the ministers couldn't afford to pay a hotel bill and the expense of coming to the conference too. I felt sure that this couldn't be the case with my niece's husband; so I said it must be a pretty poor lot of men who couldn't stand that. And John Wesley said, quite bitter, that that was just what they were—a *very* poor lot of men.

We didn't say anything more onto the subject, just then. Someway, none of us seemed to feel like talking. That old omnibus a-rumbling over the stones

wasn't a good place for pondering. I couldn't get hold of a pleasant thought.

When we reached the hotel I pulled John Wesley's sleeve and asked him to get two of the very best rooms. He opened his eyes ; but done so, and we was taken to as good rooms as I was ever into.

When we'd got by ourselves, I went up to my niece's husband and says I : " John Wesley, remember that I hain't been into the church long, and that while I'm a good deal older than you be, I've got lots of things to learn. You took a good deal onto your hands when you wrote me down as a probationer into your church."

Well, he looked at me in a way that made it perfectly plain to my mind how Ellen Maria should have deliberately mistaken that rich young Hastings, who was wild after her, to take up with a man what hadn't a acre of ground to his name.

" You dear Auntie," says he, taking my hands. " It isn't you. It's the thing itself that stirred me up."

I passed it off by saying that if he wasn't stirred up at me he must prove it by presenting his respects to the folks where he'd been a-stopping at, and telling them that his wife had come and he was going to stay at the hotel with her. So, he come along. And I felt better when I knew that Ellen Maria's husband wasn't a ministerial tramp, accepting board and lodging. I just took solid comfort paying that hotel bill.

But, when John Wesley wasn't around, I kept at Ellen Maria till I found out that the things I'd noticed in her house and hadn't liked because they seemed too saving, had been matters of up and down necessity. You can imagine how I felt. Everything I've got goes to her, some day, and she could have a yearly allowance if it seemed best.

But I found out some things that morning that was good for me to know. You see, the last minister had seven children and, because John Wesley didn't have



any, the church just cut his salary down, according. Then, on top of that, they paid him so slow that 'twas next to onpossible for him to get through. And he'd come to conference with two hundred dollars back on his salary that he'd never get—not because he wasn't liked, for they owned up that the church had growed more than it had in many a year,—but because they was usually back about that sum.

I was perfectly shocked and asked her how they ever expected to get another minister if they cut up in that way. And she said that no one knew of it. The church wouldn't tell, and the minister was too proud and made a gift of the two hundred dollars, so as to have it go onto the records that his church was as good as the rest.

"And it is," she said. "They are nearly all so, Auntie. That's what discourages John so."

Then I said that I'd like to know what

business a church had, anyway, in estimating a man's salary according to the size of his family.

She said as how that it begun when folks first come to America, and were so poor that they could hardly get food enough to put into their mouths. That ministers used to meet with the members of the scattered churches and sit down and plan as to the very least they could get along on. They done it cheerily and lovingly, because they wanted to help souls.

But when the times changed, this custom didn't, and while the peoples' purses got full, the ministers' stayed empty. They kept up the old farce of estimating how little he could get along on though the necessity of it had passed away. That the Methodist Church was very broad about missionary work and church extension and such like, but that it was very narrow and inquisitive about the expenses of its ministers' families.

Being a business woman I naturally

got excited; and, though Ellen Maria had spoke very calm, as if it was a thing to be regretted but could not be helped, I, not having the sweet temper of her mother, didn't feel so like a Lamb. I said, right out that a church had about as much occasion to reckon onto the least possible number of its minister's needs as it had to decide upon the family expenses of the man what put up its lightning rods. The work of the lightning-rod man was to keep the building from fire. And the work of the minister was to help save their everlasting souls, according to their own creed, from a fire that meant a good deal more. (This about the rods come into my mind because I'd just paid out a good deal to have 'em put onto my house and barn.)

Another thing that added to John Wesley's sensitiveness, said Ellen Maria, was that, just now, his father was a wornout minister, and he wanted him to stop preaching and let him take care of him

and the mother, if he could. But that while the places given to young men weren't all missionary places, the members wanted all the self-denial to come out of the minister. They was comfortable: but he must take what he could get.

John Wesley said that if 'twan't for his father and mother and his wife he'd go out onto the borders and do genuine pioneer work; that it wasn't heroism that made a man stand by a comfortable-off church and take just whatever they had a mind to hand out to him. He said that such folks didn't buy books nor take expensive periodicals and they wasn't qualified to decide onto a man's intellectual needs—let alone anything else.

Then, I thought of how he'd had to lift some folks in Tompkin's Corners, almost with a jack-screw, so as to get 'em up to taking a church paper. And I said to myself that a common chore-boy stood a better chance for his rights.

Well, we was kept so busy 'tending the anniversaries of the societies that these things laid quiet into a corner of my mind. My heart was made to swell with pride over our greatest religious publishing house in the world, and over the three churches every day that Methodism is a-building.

My soul was swung away up to the gates of Heaven by the singing of a man who had the blackest eyes, and the whitest smile, and the most heaven-born enthusiasm of any man I had ever seen. I shan't never forget the song where he spoke of Christ's image being smiled onto our hearts. It was real good for me to be there, and I had sense enough to know it.

Well, I was present, likewise, at the close of the conference, when the Bishop read off the appointments. I was just fool enough to up and cry when he talked so appealing to them meek-faced men, about not minding what kind of a place, in the proverdence of God, they was sent to, because they should be thankful to

be permitted to preach at all. That their Master hadn't a place to lay his head; and a lot more of such teching stuff.

Well, after he'd got 'em all mellered up, and kind of anxious to go out and have a hard time, he begun reading off 'n some long papers he held into his hands.

"Sech a deestrick, sech a man, presiding elder. Sech a place, so and so; sech a place, so and so," and so on.

There was a man with a anxious face onto him who set next me. When "sech a place, so and so," was read, he caught his breath and gave a little groan, and bent his head in a little and a little more, until it got away down. And then I saw some shiny drops fall onto the floor.

I didn't hear any more of the appointments. My heart jest set itself a-listening to that man's slow sighs. Finally, when it was over and I got a chance, I said to him, quiet like.

"Tell it to me. I'm old enough to be

your aunt. And maybe 'twill be easier to take home after you've unloaded part of it onto me."

He held up his head a little proud. But, after he'd seen into my face, he seemed to relent. "I don't mind for myself," said he. "But for *her* and the boy. She's set her heart onto his going to college—he's such a bright lad, and she's prepared him in Greek, Latin and mathematics. And his heart is set on it, too. And I'm afraid, he's so high-spirited and has worked so hard, that he'll drop away down and give up trying to be somebody. It's been a hard fight. I've been asked for at a place where they pay two hundred dollars more and was expecting to go; but the Bishop has read me off to a place what pays two hundred less than I've been getting. They're building a church. Their minister has just died. And they expect me to go there and finish that church. I don't see how I'm going to tell her and the boy!"

It showed the power of grace, that this man could take another man's commands without even thinking of a refusal. But I only said :

"Hearten up if you possibly can. Things most always come out better than they look. I've got a relation who's a member of the church you was read off to. And I'll stir him up. He's close on money matters : *but I know how to stir him up !*"

Then I gave him a handshake and went away. But all night long I seen them tears a-dropping, and heard that smothered-up sighing. And I thought of that mother, so proud of her boy and, before I knew it, I was wandering away back into a time when I thought that I might have a boy of my own, maybe. I couldn't help it. The night didn't give me a wink of sleep. Them early memories was a-telling on me.

The next morning, when we went to the station, there was the Bishop a-waiting for the train that went just after ourn.

Seeing him quite upset me, I couldn't help going up and speaking to him. I said I hoped he'd excuse me. I hadn't a college education and didn't know anything about presiding over conferences. But it seemed to me that it would have been a good deal more to the point, if, instead of exhorting all them care-worn ministers to take whatever was in store for them thankfully, he had added a little to the store, and done some real up-and-down work for the Lord by straightening out some of them laymen who set around so kind of serene, to listen.

"Jest tell 'em oncet," I said, "how mis'able stingy the most of 'em is, when it comes to paying for the church of God, and for the minister's services into His Holy Temple."

This sounded as though I was warming up into eloquence : but I wasn't going to stop on that account. The Bishop just put back his head and fixed his spectacles and *looked*.

"But," says I, going right on, "just tell 'em *once*, that they've no business to let their church look like a barn and their parsonage like a poor-house ; and go to estimating just how miserably little the minister and his fambly can live on : and then a-holding on to the miserable pittance just as long as they posserble can : and handing it out to him grudgingly ; and making him feel that him and his fambly hasn't a right to anything—that they are just reg'lar built paupers. And besides that," says I, "I don't think anything of your cast-iron rules in this nineteenth century. If a place wants a man and the man wants the place, you ought to bring it around, somehow, it 'pears to me."

"My good sister," says the Bishop, *very* polite, "where has your husband been sent, or your son, maybe? If you had come to me sooner, perhaps it could have been arranged."

I told him that I wan't pleading for my

own self. I was a respectable, comfortable-off maiden woman with a stiddy income that had lately been consercrated to the Lord. But that my heart could be touched by a sight of somebody's else's troubles.

Just then I heard the train whistle, and said "good morning," and went away.

The Bishop took off his hat and bowed real low, for a Bishop. After we'd got into the cars I explained things to John Wesley and Ellen Maria. They smiled sort of queer and John Wesley said, in a grim way, that he shouldn't wonder if the Bishop might find it convenient to do some pondering.

CHAPTER IX

Aunt Elvira Ponders onto the
Division Existing between
the Young and the Old in
the Spiritual Life at Tomp-
kin's Corners

SINCE going to work in the church,
there ain't so much time as you might
think left for me to go a-courting of the
muses—as folks say when they turn lit-
erary.

The thing that's troubled me lately, is
the regular Thursday night prayer-meet-
ing. To my mind, this meeting ought to
belong to old and young alike : but some
way it don't seem to.

After the young folks had got to be
more interested into the church because

the old folks begun to be more interested in *them*, they went to talking about having a young folks' prayer-meeting for Tuesday nights. It troubled me a good deal and I just asked them not to start that meeting for a few weeks, but to come, regular, to the Thursday night meetings, and take hold and help and see if they couldn't worry along.

Well, they done so; but 'stid o' things coming out as I had hoped, they turned exactly the other way. And that Tuesday night meeting is going on. One gulf has been bridged over between the old and the young, but another has been dug. And there hain't nothing left to me but to go wandering 'round, all smiley and chirruppy outside, trying to make the best of it, and excuse each side to the other; but with my heart all sore and grieving down out of sight.

Not that I mind the young folkses having meetings by themselves if they can only come with all the church on to

common ground in the middle of the week. But I can see that this step means a growth that is separate and not side by side, as the young oaks over on the hills grow up under shelter of the staunch old ones that have weathered many a blast.

Well, while the young folks was a-going to the Thursday night meetings, as I asked them to, it was quite natural that I should begin trying to look through young eyes and to listen with young ears. As I done so, my heart kept growing heavier and heavier, till, at last, when they come to me and said:

“Aunt Elvira, do you blame us?” I had to swallow pretty hard, but I couldn’t say that I did.

I was coming, against my will, to fear that some of our members forget that “Christ calls us to *simple service* instead of to certain set ways.” I begun to see it more clear-like after Nellie Ray come to me one day and said—says she:

“Auntie, I’m having a lot of trouble.

I want some one"—she didn't say who it was, but she blushed real pretty and, bless you, I read the name all over her face—"who is a friend of mine, to be a Christian. He seemed to think very seriously about it until he went once with me to prayer-meeting. Then he said that if *that* meant religion he thought people were better off without it. And I can't do anything with him any more."

Well, after she'd gone, I set to pondering. I'd heard Methodists called noisy and old-fashioned and such like names all my days. And I'd grown to expect that a regular-built Methodist meeting would have more or less racket crowded into it.

But, listening in my heart with young ears, I began to wonder concerning the why of this, until it begun—having my attention so called onto it—to seem to me that the old members kept the meetings noisy because they thought they must; and that, somehow, they felt they wasn't

doing their whole duty unless they give matters a general stirring up.

I jest thought I'd look into the library of my niece's husband and see if there was good and sufficient reason for such carrings on. *If there was, I made up my mind to stand by it till grim death.*

Well, I looked into them books and, amongst other things very strong against vehemence in meetings, I found that John Wesley, the founder of Methodism said :

"Only see that your heart be right toward God, that you know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, that you love your neighbor, and walk as your Master walked, and I desire no more. I am sick of opinions. I am weary to hear them. My soul loathes this frothy food. Give me solid and substantial religion; give me an humble, gentle lover of God and man."

In addition to this, I found a letter he'd wrote to a minister reproving him for

using violence in his religious exercises. You can't imagine how beat out I was! It took my breath all away. I just set before my back-parlor fire that night with such a bewildered air that Martha Ann was scared nigh about to death. She went and brought me in a bowl of boneset tea, and insisted upon my taking of it before I went to bed.

I seen that there wan't nothing left but just to tell her what I was thinking onto, or else to drink that bowl of boneset. So I dog-nosed my case, as it were, and proved to her that it was something that couldn't be reached by boneset tea.

I begun by calling up our labors—hern and mine—to get the young folks interested into the church. Then I told her that it had suddenly come over me, as I set pondering one day, that the young and the old was leading their spiritual lives along different lines; and as far apart as morning is from evening, with

the dawning-glory of Heaven into one and into the other, a fading light.

I read out loud to her some of the words of the great founder of Methodism that had so upset me. Well, she just got up out of her chair and set that bowl of boneset tea onto the mantel, and stood bolt upright afore me and says she :

“ Miss Hopkins, you’ve made me a happy woman.” She stopped and swallowed real hard, and looked into the fire and shet her eyes over and over again. Then she fired up and says she : “ Ef that’s so, then how should the common idee of Methodism be so different ? Who’s been lying about a church for all of these years, I’d like to know ? Ef what you’ve read to me is true, then Methodism is suffering cause there’s a big misunderstanding into the minds of most folks, as to what its real sperret is. And it’s *our* business to go to work a-correctin’ of them wrong impressions to oncet ! Why, it’s the blesseddest, sweetest creed under the

sun. A baby could see straight through it. It ain't the kind that 'ud orter go 'long with uproar."

I tried to quiet her, but 'twan't any use. If Martha Ann once gets started, she *will* have her say out, and there's no standing in the way of it.

"Now, there's old Mr. Harpending," says she, agoing right on, "who's always praying on top of his voice for the 'peace that floweth like a river,' and the 'joy that is unspeakable.' Now, *his* peace couldn't flow like a river, ef it wanted to. It's a reg'lar hot spring, or a spoutin' geyser—like them what the Geography tells 'bout 'way down there in Arkansas. An' I jest thought last Thursday night when he was prayin', an' I seen the sexton keepin' a kind o' anxious eye onto the cracked plas'tring just over his head, I thought to myself, thinks I, Ef there *is* a joy what it ain't posserble fur *you* to speak of, Hezekiah Harpending, then it must be a *climaxer*!"

Martha Ann knowed that I wouldn't like such goings on, and after she'd freed her mind, she didn't give me no chance to say a word. She jest took that bowl of boneset tea off'n the mantel, and went out as fast as her legs would carry her.

After she'd gone I set still till the fire went out, and my rheumatiz begun to call my mind offen th' church and fasten it onto myself. But, all the while, I couldn't help owning up that Martha Ann had expressed my feelings 'long side o' hern.

If the Thursday night meeting is for prayer, and if prayer means that we are asking things of the Lord, then we'd orter come into His house and speak to Him as respectful as we would to our next-door neighbor. If I wanted to borry some sugar of Mrs. Bates, now—which I never do, being forehanded in perviding fur my table—would I go and stand into the middle of the floor, and stamp and wring my hands and scream on to the top of my

voice? Why I'd scare her to death. She'd think me a gone lunatic. And she'd have a right to think so, too.

I don't know what to do. It's my nature—not being one of the clinging sort, from never having had nobody to cling to—to feel *drawn to do* whatever seems to need doing. But it'll take a deal of pondering to screw up my courage to the sticking point, this time.

CHAPTER X

She is of the Opinion that
Christians, Taking Them as
They Run, Are about as
Touchy as Musicians ever
Thought of Being

AFTER I'd had that narrer escape from the boneset tea, Martha Ann's words kep' a-ringing into my ears, "It is our business, as Methodists, to go to work a-correcting of them wrong impressions *to once!*"

Somehow, I begun to feel more and more tender-like toward the great Church, and toward the little circle at Tompkin's Corners, as being the part that I was, as far as one name on the church record can go, pertickeler responsible for. It begun

to kind o' hurt my feelings to know that anybody could see things in its methods of religious service what they could laugh at or make sort o' slighting remarks onto. Queer, but that's come to be my feelings straight along.

Well, I was considerable wrought up, in a quiet way. Nobody but Martha Ann guessed of the fires within ; and she didn't let on. Only she begun to look at me, as the days went by and nothing wan't done, with a sort of disappointed look onto her face, as though I wasn't coming up to the mark, for once.

But, you see, I know my failings better'n anybody else—except the Lord—and I just waited and prayed for a calm sperit—not being so sweet-hearted an' gentle-spoken as Ellen Maria's mother was—so that I shouldn't disgrace my perfession, even if the pressure was pretty heavy.

As last I felt that the time had come. It was my usual custom to stay into Sun-

day school after the morning preaching, and go into Mr. Pease's Bible class. He's an ole man. But he's growed ole like a great pine, and though he's strong in thought, he's so quiet-like in speech that, whenever he gets up in meeting, the noisiest of 'em have to keep still, because they know they'll lose something wuth hearing ef they don't.

Sometimes, because the members urge it on me so, I've gone into the Sunday noon class, led by Hezekiah Harpending. I'd pondered this subjick and made up my mind that this class-meeting was the place for me to speak out into, about our not being too free in our carrying of the Ark of the Lord.

I'd came to this conclusion because, the Sunday before, when the superintendent of the Sunday School had said, "Let us bow our heads in silent prayer for a moment," at the opening of the school, there had come such waves of uproar from that class-room, two doors away,

as must have druv all feelings of devotion from every heart but the most saintly—and mine wasn't one of 'em.

I had seen the young folks nudge each other and smile: the small boys snickered, and a sort of baffled look came over the superintendent's face, as though it would be hard to get the school in hand again for that day.

So, I made up my mind, as the uproarious ones was in the habit of stopping in that class, that I'd just go in there and, while they was feeling blessed, 'twould be good a time to speak to them on the subjick that was so near my heart. It wan't wise. I see it now. But human nature is a harder thing to study out and make sure on than any sum that ever come into a college course anywhere.

Providence seemed to favor my plans, for John Wesley Gray, our young preacher, preached as I'd never hearn him before. The subjick was Christian Sacrifice. The heart of every one was

tender. Some of 'em was ready to break down with feeling. So the noon class was bigger than usual,—for I've noticed that if they get something pretty good from the pulpit, they usual go into the class to talk onto it and to have a good time.

Well, it was most special that day. I had to learn that most of the human race enjoy being made martyrs of ; and the thought of Christian sacrifice laid along that line. They opened up the meeting by starting the hymn what has into it

“ We should expect some danger near
Where we possess delight.”

And while a few of 'em sung, the heft of 'em groaned. But I hoped and prayed, silent-wise, in my heart.

We knelt down. Old Mr. Storms was asked to lead. I pondered onto his prayer and, to save my life, I couldn't help a-saying over to myself them words from Scripture, “ as one who beateth the air,”

because it didn't seem possible that the man could feel that his words was going straight to a great Heart that was so tender and loving that it poured out its life-blood for mistaken and wandering souls. If he had felt that, it would a-seemed more kinder natural if he'd sort of nestled close up to that great heart, and had a-had something like awe in his manner—because he was a-daring to draw nigh to something what was 'way beyond his comprehension.

We rose from our knees and some one struck up, in a voice that would have woke up them seven Greek sleepers in less than no time,

“ My drowsy powers why sleep ye so ? ”

The leader gave in his testimony first of all. He talked about the blessedness of Christian sacrifice, and every once in a while, he rose up onto his toes and then let himself down, suddint, onto his heels with a jar that rattled the window. And

whenever he done so, a passel of 'em cried out.

The Bible asks twice, clost together in the Psalms, "Preserve me, oh Lord, from the violent man!" and, in the New Testament, the apostle says, "Bodily exercise profiteth nothing." I ain't very well up in Scripture quoting, but the little I do know, had an oncomfortable way of turning up that morning. I shet my eyes hard and when they opened they fell, by chance, onto Jane Ellsworth. She's fifty ef she is a day. But she looked so holy and sweet that I forgot that her cheeks had lost their color and that the dimples about her mouth had turned into lines long ago.

I jest couldn't keep my eyes off'n her. And I thought, "Now she's going to shout." But she didn't. There was the rim of a smile that meant Heaven 'stid of earth a-glimpsing out of her eyes and mouth and shining all over her face—as ef she was kinder circled 'round with peace.

And when somebody near her hollered right out, I seen a kind of sudden shiver come over her. Thinks I to myself, "She ain't that kind. It was left out en her constitution."

Just then come my turn. Feeling strengthened by her look I got up and told them, in the gentlest way that a stiff maiden-woman can—who's got to be sort of hard-mannered through doing her own battling through life,—that I'd missed so many years of working for the Church that I'd got to work the harder the rest of my days. Then I spoke of the young folks, and the smile onto Jane Ellsworth's face got whiter and sweeter, and my own voice, that carries me straight through most everything, sort of bent and weakened till I thought I'd never get out what I'd started to say.

And I told 'em how I'd felt about the young folks going off by theirselves to pray and to speak. And I said a word or two about John Wesley, the founder, that

seemed to put an awful feeling around onto the meeting. It struck like an ague chill.

But I went on and told them that Christ himself said, over and over, "Feed my lambs," but that we couldn't get near enough to them, spiritually, if we went to work and scairt 'em to death. Then I stopped by saying that I wasn't nothing but a blunderer, any way, and that most probable, I hadn't said things as I'd ought to ; but that my heart was getting tenderer every day. And when they talked of Christian sacrifice, it looked to me 'sif here was a chance to sacrifice our own good times in the social meetings, and not ask for all the sacrifice to be done by them as was so young and childlike in the way.

I told them that I believed the Lord would help us to grow spiritually just the same, because he let other things grow without their making any fuss about it. The flowers never make a noise when

they bloom out, and the great trees just reach and reach their branches up toward the sun and get stronger every day. And they don't make the least bit of a racket about it.

I set down. It didn't take near so long for me to say it as to write it. But I was clean beat out. Then Hezekiah Harpending cleared his throat and perceeded to exhort me. He said that he'd felt for some time that I was "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense" to the further progress of this church. That I hadn't no right to critercize their ways of doing things, *for I wasn't nothing but an old warmed-up Presbyterian, any way.*

I don't know another thing that was said or spoke. When the meeting broke up, Jane Ellsworth came up to me and took both my hands into hern and kissed me on the cheek. She didn't say a word, but went out with me, and walked clost to me all the way to my gate—though her own home is on the other side of the

corners. And she ain't strong enough to walk fur. I tried to be perlite and ask her to come in ; but she just took my hand agin and squeezed it and went away.

Well, I got through the day and the other days next onto it. My young pastor hearn about it and come to get my side. I told him jest the wust that I really said and I wound up by saying : " You took a good deal onto your hands when you wrote me down as a member into your church."

And what do you s'pose he said? " Why," says he, " Aunt Elvira, if there were more like you in the church, the kingdom of Christ would come several thousand years sooner than it is expected now, God bless you ! "

I was clean beat out.

But I've gone right on acting as ef nothing hadn't happened. Some was 'feard that I'd withdraw and go to the Presbyterians. But, bless you, I ain't that kind. I don't go and git a divorce

from a church, just 'cause everybody into it don't do as I want 'em to. I meant it for life when I joined. And I'll stay through life if they'll let me.

But, when I set pondering by my back parlor fire, the thought that comes to my mind is that we ought to live and act, *in* the church as well as out of it, with the beautiful dignity of king's sons and daughters. We hain't got no right to do otherwise, we hain't. It's a sweet and sacred thing to be allowed to come nigh to the great Ruler of Heaven and Earth. And we ought, at least, to use as nice manners as we would if we was going to the White House to ask a favor of the President.

We wouldn't go there without behaving our very prettiest. We'd go in quiet-like. Maybe we'd smile, gladly, at any others what was there a-asking, too, 'cause 'twould be pleasant to find 'em there, 'n, maybe, we'd shake hands and speak to 'em, kind o' cheery.

And when it come our turn to speak to the President, we'd be sort of respectf'ul. We'd want to get his good opinion as we went along in our petition. And if we had something *very* particular—like asking for the pardon of some friend—we'd be real earnest and we'd cry some, perhaps; but we'd be awful keerful to remember that we was asking for great things from somebody what was able to give *or to refuse*. And we'd be awful keerful not to give him, nor nobody else, the idea that we was bent onto having our own way; anyhow we'd be mighty keerful not to rile the President.

I've heern about a book what a big Perfessor from Europe wrote onto "Natural Law in the Spiritual World." I hain't read it, not being no book-worm: yet many's the time that I've just said them words over to myself, "Natural Law in the Spiritual World." We hain't got, nowheres else to learn heavenly manners 'cept on earth. Christ knew we hadn't.

So He come to teach us how to forget ourselves in remembering to try to help others. But I'm afeard a lot of us forget what we call high-breeding when we come into the court of Heaven. And it don't seem the properest thing to do, and, as you may believe, I've give to this pertickerler subjick a good deal of honest pondering.

CHAPTER XI

Martha Ann Shows her Affec-
tion in a Peculiar Manner,
and Afterward Expatriates
upon the Liability of Man-
kind to Misunderstand Each
Other

I WAS surprised and disturbed, a few weeks ago, by the queer goings on of Martha Ann. This is the way the matter come about : You see I simply went out one afternoon to look after a fambly what had been having a deal o' trouble—one way and another—who needed heartening up a little with some of the substantials of life.

Now, it seems that whilst I was gone, Martha Ann remembered that it was the

day of the week when my church paper, onto which I set much store, was in the habit of coming. So, when it was time for the stage, she just clapped on her bunnit and went to fetch it, so as to have it ready fur me when I'd drunk my tea.

I was a spec later a-coming than she expected—owing to my staying by the sick baby while its mother took a little rest. And while Martha Ann was a-waiting, she thought she'd take a dip into the paper to while away time. She didn't hear me when I come, till I opened the dining-room door—sudden-like, being that I was late—when she give a jump, and I noticed that she crumpled up something she had into her hands, and went out into the kitchen as if I'd a-ketched her doing of something wrong.

She come in after quite a spell and brung my tea. But she spilt it onto the tablecloth as she was a-setting of it down. I didn't notice that, particular; but she begun to talk surprisin' fast. And when

I looked up I seen that her eyes was snappin' and her cap was onto one side of her head.

I was sure something was up. And I waited for her to tell. I give to her several real good chances. But she didn't tell. Then I went to feeling 'round with some questions as to whether anybody had called—for, you see, I remembered how the so-called Free Methodists had been there once when I was away, and how they'd fired her all up.

But she said as how't nobody'd been in. Then I asked if she'd been out; and she said she had. She'd been to the post-office and had a letter for me and forgot to hand it to me. She sprung up with a sort of relieved fling to her head, and handed me the letter.

Arter a while, I begun to miss my paper. So I asked her if she hadn't got it from the office. Then *she* asked *me* what I wanted of that old paper, anyway. That it wan't of no account, noway, and

I'd good deal better be reading of my Bible!

I looked at her, stiddy, for a minute, and then said: "I don't understand you, Martha Ann. I think a good deal of you and of your advice, but I don't like to have it flung at me this way."

She didn't say anything. She just went out and shut the door harder than was at all necessary. She was feeling very uncomfortable; and it upset me a good deal.

The next afternoon, when the stage come in, I went over after the mail; and not finding this pertickerler paper, spoke of it to the postmaster. Now he's a very careful man about the mail. He said that he'd gave it to Martha Ann the day afore. He remembered special, 'cause she said I was allers so glad to get it.

I went home with my mind made up to have it out with her. She tried to put me off. I wouldn't be put off. Finally she said, with a little shake into her

voice, that she was jest a-trying to save me from feeling bad. But that if I would, I would, and she might a knowed it!

Then she went out and, after a long spell, brung me the paper. It had been wrinkled all up and then ironed out again. As I unfolded it she sort of hovered around me till I looked up with a smile.

"Well, what is it, any way? I don't see anything that makes me feel bad."

Then she laid her long finger onto a place on the front page. "There's somebody as has been writin' a piece to sort o-anser what you said into the class-meetin'," she said. "There's a man by the name of Galusha Goings—and I can't see how a mother with a heart into her buzzum could name her innercent boy Galusha. Still, I don't know but what you'd orter expect almost anything from a woman who was fool enough to marry herself to a man by the name of Goings.

"Well, this *brother* is a-takin' of you *to do*, because he thinks you don't see the

precise saving quality there is in a religion what consists, mostly, of racket. And he says you'd better try to keep church members away from the theatres and shows, an' stop 'em of their card playin' --'stid of tryin' to quiet of 'em down.

"Jest's if we hain't worked, 'n contrived, 'n spent money, 'n urged other members to open their housen, an' all fur th' special purpose of giving the young folks of Tompkin's Corners somethin' to do 'side from playin' cards 'n sech truck. It all jest goes to show how't a man *will* misunderstand everything, anyway. I don't set no stock by *men*. They're the most *misunderstandingest* set I ever hearn tell on!"

I didn't say anything immediate, for those words of Martha Ann's about its being easy for a man to misunderstand things, took my thoughts too fur away to care about the paper or what anybody could say now, into a time when my life was young and my words come straight

outen a merry heart. And when something I said once in the happy twilight was misunderstood by the one man whose right thought of me made all my joy ; and how I could not set the matter straight, though I tried as well as I could with a heart that was breaking.

After a little, I said to Martha Ann, "Well, never mind. We are not to blame for being misunderstood. We are only to blame if we don't do our best with all our might."

Then I read the letter into the paper, and it surprised me a good deal. The writer of it seemed to show very little knowledge of the ways of such churches as ours at Tompkin's Corners. I don't set up to being much of a traveler, but I've seen quite a number of churches offen the same piece as a portion of ourn is. And that is, having a set of folks who seem to measure their own spiritual stature by their ability to make prayer-meetings and class-meetings oncomfortable



for other folks. I wouldn't a-been surprised if some college perfessor or doctor of divinity had a-criticized my way of talking about what we wanted into the church: but to hev a man setting up in the church paper to please the Hezekiah Harpending folks, 'stid o'gently nourishing the lambs and shy ones of the flock, beat me clean out.

Trying to help somebody else sort of dignifies anybody's life—makes it seem more worth while to keep on a-living. Being simply sot on gitting saved ourselves in jest the pertickerler way that gratifies our feelings without thinking that, may be, we're kind o' upsetting somebody's else faith in the unselfishness of Christians—that's what I call crippling to the soul.

I've found out, to my sorrer, that it's dangerous ground onto which I'm treading. I'm tender in my heart toward all the members; and surely tender to those who seem to me to be misguided some-

what, when they can so blindly shut their eyes to the number of lambkins what are scairt away from our church, every year, by being made to think that if they hope to be counted amongst the saved ones, they must get into working themselves up into a certain pitch of excitement in every social religious meeting.

There be times—God be praised for 'em!—when the most timid would rejoice in hallelujahs. But we'd orter be real careful not to set others to believing that our pertickerler denomination understands that the meeting-house and *not* the secret place, is where we can give unbounded vent to our feelings and emotions.

It's easy enough to cry, "O, how I love Thy Church!" but we should take special pains not to let anyone get to thinking that our love for the Church means simply our love for a certain effusive way of doing things—a way that, mostly, wastes itself in cries. We don't want them to hear only great big prayers for grace

to do God's work with, and then, if they happen to look at us outside of the meeting, let them get sad at heart a-seeing of what paltry work follers onto them prayers.

May I be forgave by Him of whom the prophet wrote that He should not cry; neither should His voice be heard in the streets, if I love the mellow, steady light of God's grace shining morning, noon and night, through every day of the year out of a Christian life, better than I can love the blazing and cracking of fireworks that are just let off at odd spells, whenever folks happen to feel in the cracker and rocket mood.

Perhaps it's foolish, and I may be into my second childhood, but, because I'm laying out on the Church the love that I would have give to husband and children and toddling grandchildren, I say to myself whenever I see a young man what's losing interest because of certain cast-iron ways of conducting prayer-meeting, says I, "What ef he was *my* son?" And

then I think as how't I couldn't stand by, peaceable, and see the Church a-losing of its hold onto him.

Or, whenever a light-hearted, gentle young woman, who has loving friends all circling 'round her in this beautiful world, comes to me and says that she likes to go to a church where God's service seems to be something fair and lifting up, instead of long-faced and crucifying all of the time, why I just think, "Suppose this was my own daughter?"

And I can't go and tell her that this world is a wilderness of woe that Christ won't help her through if she goes to Him reverent-like and frank, like a loving child and asks for His help. I just tell her that nobody on earth has got so good a right to be happy and content as a Christian has. And we look into each other's faces and smile till our eyes get full. And we say that it's blessed to be His'n, and we'll be careful to live unspotted.

I didn't mean to run on so, and not being much used to literature writing, maybe I don't make myself real clear. But the more I ponder onto this subjick the more seriouser it gets.

CHAPTER XII

Aunt Elvira has Heard Some
Criticism of Sunday-school
Music and Writes Concern-
ing the Singing at the
Tompkin's Corners Metho-
dist Episcopal Church

SOME folks has been saying a good deal about singing them ole hymns and nothing else. Maybe they're right, I don't know. But, as fur *me*, I hain't got no fault whatever to find about the Sunday-school singing in Tompkin's Corners.

Some of the pieces don't have any too much theology crowded into 'em, I know. The grand old hymns are like rocks what uv been use ter weathering the waves.

But 'twould seem mighty queer to see a passel o' young folks a-gitting saved at the altar by singing, "Hark from the tombs a doleful sound;" or to any words that could be got into a tune like Windham.

It's true that Christ is a covert from the tempests of life. But I don't hanker arter church members who was druv into the church by fear and not drawed there by love.

They sing out of the *Epworth* singing-book to our Sunday-school; and some of the pieces begin like this:

"O, scatter seeds of loving deeds,"
 "Pass me not, oh, gentle Saviour,"
 "One more day's work for Jesus,"
 "Abide with me,"
 "Dare to do right, dare to be true!"
 "All the way my Saviour leads me,"
 "Gather them in, for there yet is room,"
 "Break, Thou, the bread of life,"
 "Yes, for me, for me He careth."

I could give a good many more, but

these answer the purpose. After going into Sunday-school and listening to old and young singing such words, along with the sunny-faced young man what leads the singing, I go home in a kind of circling peace what helps me in my living for a good spell.

CHAPTER XIII

Aunt Elvira is a Methodist—
Heart, Soul and Pocket-
book—and in her Love for
the Church she is Troubled
at Some of its Methods in
Revival Meetings

IT is quite a spell sence I have wrote on
to this book. Fact is, I give it up
once and made up my mind to let book-
making out to them what was more
competenter.

But, some way a-nother, the sperrit's
took hold onto me again with a firm
grip. Maybe nothing won't come of this
writing neither, but I'll be more apt to
feel better if I set about it once more:
because, if you'll believe it, I've set to

pondering again. And, really, it 'pears to me that a few more words wouldn't be out of the way.

You recommember that I joined onto the Church rather late in life. It all come about through my favorite niece, Ellen Maria, going and marrying herself to a young minister named John Wesley Gray; and then they two a-leading such sweet lives as to make my ole heart hungry after the heavenly something that I could see shining into all their doings and that went singing through all their sayings.

John Wesley was 'pointed to a church in New York City arter he'd sarved his term out in Tompkin's Corners and I was, oh, so lonesome arter they'd gone away. He and Ellen Maria has been a-urging of me and Martha Ann—I can't do nothing nor go anywheres without Martha Ann, you know—to come down to the city and make them a long visit.

Nacherly, we—being plain folks from Tompkin's Corners—was a bit nervous.

But you'd a-thought we was kings and queens by the way they welcomed us. We felt pretty much to home the fust day ; and we was well onto the ways of city folks in less than no time.

Then I, nacherly, begun a-looking into this city church and a-pondering onto it. And I'm getting to be awful 'fraid that my nephew-in-law and his church is a-making of a big mistake.

Sech hundreds and hundreds of folks—old and young, to say nothing of the little children—all around, under the very church walls, and so few come inside of it. And Christ is just as sweet and helpful and powerful to draw men now, as He was on the shores of Galilee.

Hearts is just as hungry now as they could possible a been then. I know it, for my own old heart wakes up, sometimes, and cries till nothing but Jesus's love can still it. And if folks don't come to Him now, it must be because them what are echoing the "Follow me!" what was

spoke on the shores of Galilee are a-making some little mistake in their way of doing it.

We went to church last Sunday evening—Martha Ann and me. A revival is a-going on and, nacherly, we was interested to see if it was carried forard in the same way as we do at Tompkin's Corners.

In the church to which we have the honor to belong a week of prayer always begins with the first Sunday of the New Year. This means that every evening of that week there must be services of special prayer for special subjicks. This most allers is the beginning of a revival—a time when church members take new interest into spiritual things and when men and women are invited to begin leading a Christian life.

That evening John Wesley preached a sermon what showed to us, who know him best, just how earnest and sincere he is—a loving, pleading, reaching-out sermon

that seems as would a melted a heart of stone.

And he closed up by asking of the Official Board to come into the altar, while he begged, tender-like, of them who wasn't Christians to come forreds and make their peace with God.

There was deep feeling all over the church. The Official Board—nice, quiet, stiddy-looking men—went inside o' the altar rail; but nobody else moved toward it.

Then a very learned man got up and give a teching exhortation. He tole how he'd sought into the schools—here and in Europe—for them things invisible which gives meaning to life. And he, too, asked men and women to come and kneel down to the altar and be blessed of God.

He asked if they was going to quibble about logic and fail to grasp the only thing that could fetch beauty and peace into their lives.

He was real airnest, though he just

talked gentle-like and self-controlled. The feeling was strong over the people. I believe that a good many hearts was open to the Heaven influence that seemed to fill the air like wings of unseen angels.

But when he set up a testing of the people by asking if they didn't have the moral courage to get up and come to the altar; and went on a-picturing of it as sech a trifling thing to do, there seemed to come a sort of disturbing spirit over everything.

And, somehow, the time when I joined onto the Church come into my mind. How I jest put on my bunnit and went straight over to the parsonage and into John Wesley's study and said to him, then and there, that I was tired of my way of living and wanted to begin a new and better way.

And how he jest said—a-taking both of my hands into hisn, "I'm glad. And Ellen Maria, she'll be glad, too." And with his eyes shining and soft-like, he

just took down the record book and entered my name as a probationer into the Church.

Sometimes I'm feared that if he'd insisted onto my going forreds afore a church full of folks, I might a gi'n out and so would a-missed more than I can tell.

So, it seemed to me, that the folks wasn't a-quibbling at logic so much as they was wondering why on airth they must be called upon to do that particular public thing, if they wanted to get saved in Heaven at last.

John Wesley asked the choir—and some of 'em is real pretty singers—to sing a verse of "Almost Persuaded," while he waited for some one to come to the altar seeking Christ.

Now I've allers been persuaded—'cepting to revival meetings—that Christ is lovingly seeking to save the world and not setting Himself down inside of any church altar *a-insisting* that the world

must come there in order to find Him and be saved.

I'm allers a-picturing of Him as a-coming arter them, and wanting them just to be willing to let Him find them, without insisting that they should come even the length of a church—if the church is full of people, 'cause it's hard for some timid folks to do any public thing.

Now, John Wesley and some of the brethren went, soft-like all around 'mong the folks they knew wasn't church members, a-asking of 'em in whispers to let them lead 'em to the altar.

The choir sung another verse—very feeling-like, and ended with this one:

“ Almost persuaded now to believe,
Almost persuaded Christ to receive,
Almost will not avail,
Almost is but to fail,
Sad, sad that bitter wail,
Almost, but lost ! ”

Now I've 'tended a good many revival meetings in my day, but I've never tended

one so quiet as this one. No groans, no fuss, no noise. Nobody even said "Amen!" Brother Harpending wasn't there with his loud voice a-shouting out his prayer as if the Lord had been struck stone deaf; or as ef Heaven was miles and miles away and must be took by a storm of noise.

It was quiet as a funeral. I uster long for sech; but arter getting of it the tears that rose into my eyes turned theirselves into magnifying glasses, as it were.

Martha Ann begun to see different, too. When we'd got home and was taking of our things off I noticed the set of her mouth. And it meant something. When we'd set down by the fire into our room and was a-taking our little bite before going to bed, I found out what was behind them lips.

CHAPTER XIV

Martha Ann Speaks her Mind

“THERE’S a pretty big sum for somebody to work what knows figgers,” said Martha Ann, a-looking at me outen the corner of her eye as she poured me a fresh cup of *bwu-yong*—beef-tea is what we call it at Tompkin’s Corners—“and somebody’d better git to work onto it at oncet.

“’Sef goin’ up to that altar in the face of a hull congergation was going to turn anybody into a Christian!”

Then I told her that it was simply asking of ’em to take a little step towards Christ. And she said :

"Well, who's to know that such a step is necessary, and that Christ is toward the altar any more'n He's toward the door?"

Then I said what I'd heern told over and over, that it was a very little 'thing to do for the One what had come all the way from Heaven to save——

And she interrupted me, then and there, by saying, "Well, ef He's come all the way from Heaven, He won't be likely to stop sech a little way offen them what He's come arter.

"The church folks hain't got no right," says she, "to set up too many rules nor to put any distance, howsomever short, atween Jesus Christ and a man's heart. He said 'Foller me!' in the olden time: and they jest done it. And that was all. There want no gettin' ready to foller, nor gittin fit to foller; no kneelin' and prayin' over Matthew and James an' John. When Andrew brought Peter, his brother, to Christ, the other disciples didn't have

to get down. and pray over him before Christ would take him.

“And if folks to-day hear Christ a-callin’ of ’em, I don’t know why they should be made to think that the Lord ain’t ready and a-waitin’ to take ’em. Their wantin’ to come is proof that they’re fit to come. And He’ll take men now jest as He took them others hunderds an’ hunderds of years ago. He’s jest the same. Ain’t His love an unchanging kind of love?

“He’ll tend to their sins—He an’ they, by theirselves. There don’t ’pear to me to be any pertickerler need fur a hull church official board to git ’round a man what’s felt the gentle hand of Jesus a-knockin’ at his heart, with their prayers an’ sighs in order to fix him up so’s Jesus’ll take him.

“Don’t look so shocked. I’m all riled up, and I don’t want to say anything sassy. Well, what if I *am* overthrowin’ a old established custom in the church?

Who's established it, I'd like to know? Jest weak, failin' folks like ourselves. Jesus never did.

"The good Samaritan didn't make that poor, dyin' creetur go and kneel at any altar before he'd pour the oil into his wounds. The poor creetur was too 'weak and wounded, sick an' sore.' And, maybe," here Martha Ann's voice got to be very gentle, "maybe some of them there to-night was too weak and wounded, too, away down deep into their hearts.

"I jest felt sorry fur that young man a-settin' 'longside of you. The minister and the 'sistant minister, and one or two others, come and talked to him, a-tryin' to git him forred. He didn't go. And arter they'd left him, his face was all on fire an' he looked 'round, kind o' furtive-like, 's ef he was a culprit and fit only to be singled out as a special object of prayer. 'Tain't right! No, 'taint!"

Martha Ann flourished her nightcap vigorously. "'Tain't Christlike," says

she. "Why don't them good people go quietly 'round in the daytime to the homes of sech, and do a little simple, lovin' talkin', and then put the names onto the church record and read the list out loud to some official meetin'?"

"Many's the body what might be won in that way. It's mostly the best souls what's likely to be 'feared o' theirselves. They hain't got the face to git up and go forred 'mongst hunderds of people, fur fear that they mightn't allers be found doin' jest's they'd advertised by sech a display.

"No, dearie, I won't keep still. Why hain't the churches full, when there is so many folks with unsatisfied lives goin' 'round every day under their very eaves? It's the Church's own fault. The 'holier than you be' air that breathes—whether anybody knows it or not—out uv all sech perceedin's as this un to-night. I don't see the use of making sech a fuss. Jesus didn't make no fuss at sech times.

"Then there was that hymn-singing! Wan't it jest a sight to hear that! Sakes alive! It nigh about druv me crazy. I remembered the pictures in an old book of my grandfather's, 'Emblems an' Allegories' was the name of it. And there was devils a-poking the souls of sinners down into big kittles o' fire. *That* ain't the Christ-love!

"I don't approve of that hymn, an', what's more, I never did. '*Almost, but lost!*' Is that the way the thief was treated when he was a-hanging onto the very cross? Is that the way the Samaritan done with the one who'd fell 'mong them thievin' Jericho folks?

"And jest to see John Wesley Gray—sech a gentle, pityin' man as he is—standin' there 's ef he believed in sech wickedness! When the *very last quarter of a instant*, ef a soul turns to Christ, do you s'pose John Wesley'd expect Him to say:

"'You want me, I know, and I died to

save you. But there is something wrong about my dying. It hain't quite strong 'nough to save you now. You come *jest a little too late!* 'Almost, but lost!'

"I never spoke in meeting, though I've been a Methodist as long as you have, Miss Hopkins. And, what's more, I never wanted to speak afore. But I come nigh onto gittin' right up, then an' there, in that church an' sayin':

"'You're a-puttin' a libel onto my Saviour. He's mighty 'nough to save *anybody*, ANYWHERE AN' ANYHOW! *He* don't set up no rules. An' the great founder of this Church didn't set none. He jest said that if *anybody* believed in God and desired to flee from the wrath to come—which I s'pose is the separation from God—*he will be saved*. An', ef he's goin' to let folks into Heaven that way, why must they do any more in order to git into a church? That's what I'd like to have you tell me—you or any other preacher or bishop.

"P'r'aps I'd best to shet up, now. But, I tell you, Miss Hopkins, you've got a duty to do, an' whether you see it or not, you'd orter do it."

Then she went off to bed, after making me as comfortable as possible. For, spite of her sharp tongue, Martha Ann has got the gentlest hands in the world an' the lovingest.

So she left me to think it all over and to git out of my daze—ef I could. For I know's well as she does, that John Wesley Gray is all that he makes out to be. And his wife and children know it too—for there are children now. One is named after me, and is called Vera, for short. And the little fingers fumble 'round 'mong the chords of my old heart till they waken throbs of 'mazin' tenderness.

His home life is most beautiful. Saint John is what Ellen Maria calls him, in private, to me, sometimes. And the children mind him because they love him.

How he does romp with 'em sometimes!
It's wonderful pretty!

So, you see, I know his outside life's
jest the fragrance wafted out of the flower
in his home. If any one has a right to
stand up and urge men to come to Jesus,
it's John Wesley Gray, my nephew-in-
law.

But is he a-doin' of it in the best way?
And is he a-expecting of men to do the
things they'll be liable to do—I mean the
real, sound men, what thinks a good deal,
and are worth so much to the world. The
others—the tinkling cymbal kind—
would be more likely to.

I set there alone and pondered onto
these things until the gaslight was
swallowed up in the light of the next
morning. And Martha Ann came tip-
toeing in with a scairt look onto her face,
fearing that my heart had gi'n out and
that the end she fears had come. And
she made me a bowl of boneset tea and
made me drink it, and begged my par-

don for getting so stirred up the night afore.

I forgave her. There wasn't anything to forgive. For it was her love for the Church speaking out—even in that sharp way. But I'm not yet settled in my mind as to what I'd ought to do.

CHAPTER XV

Aunt Elvira Thinks the Church is
Taking too Much upon its
Shoulders and Accomplish-
ing too Little

FOR nigh onto a week now, I've been doing some pretty heavy pondering, and Martha Ann, she's been saying some pretty hinting things about "them as knowed their duty and didn't go to doing of it."

I just ventured to make a little remark to her one day about my unworthiness—how that it got to be real late in life before I turned myself 'round so that the light from Heaven could shine into my face, and by so doing, make all the shadows of earth go stretching out straight

behind me where I couldn't see them 'less I took pains to turn clear 'round and look for them.

And I talked, real well, about my lack of education—how that I'd never even been to a seleck school—and of the hungry feeling there is 'into my heart arter the knowledge that makes a body sure about their nomatives and negatives.

And I took pains to remind her of the numbers of years I had lived with the hills 'round Tompkin's Corners a-holding into their little circle all I'd ever seen of the whole big, round world. Then I wound up by saying that it would look mighty peart in me—a middle-age maiden woman from Tompkin's County—to come right into the heart of the biggest city in our whole big country and go to setting myself up as a sort of dictating agency to them as had allers been walking into big, broad paths, with great stretches of learning right in plain sight before their very eyes.

But she wasn't convinced—Martha Ann wasn't. She just poked her hand 'way down into the foot of the long black stocking she was a-darning—she don't believe in using darning balls and sech like—and, pointing her long needle at me, she said, very slow and solumn-like, says she :

“ Miss Hopkins, you're a reg'lar built Moses. That's who you be. 'I pray thee send by some other : for thy servant hath a stammering tongue.' If you'd a-lived in this 'ere city you'd a been blinded like the rest uv 'em. They hain't to blame ; but they don't see clear. An' ef you'd a had that thare college eddication you're allers a-pinin' arter, you'd a been full o' other matters.

“ Tompkin's Corners ain't no very sightly place—bein' set so in a holler, just 'sef some big angel had a-let his hand down and was a-holdin' of us up careful so's we wouldn't tumble over. 'Sef he was a-pennin' of us in close by the hills,

so's to lead our thoughts upards, stid o' outards, so's they couldn't git thin a-trying to spread over all creation. An' stid o' listenin' to any Bishop or preachin' I ever seen, I druther hear you a-sayin' them lovin' little things you do sometimes, when we're a-settin' out onto the pie-azza, an' it's still-like, an' the twilight's bein' drawed up over our feet 'sef some lovin' hand was tryin' to keep us from ketchin' our deaths o' cold.

“ An' I hain't so terribul diffrent from other folks—I hain't. City folks has got hearts into their bodies 's well as other folks. Jest a-comin' from the country needn't make any sound, sensible woman go to settin' herself up for a fool ! ”

Then she waved her long arm, that had the stocking pulled over it, and looked straight at me while she druv the darnin'-needle into it with that look onto her face that I've got pretty well learnt by this time, you may believe.

Well, we went to another revival meet-

ing that very evening. It was held into the prayer-meeting room, and was more homeliker than the other one. Still, it kep' me a-ponderin'.

They opened up first with a season of prayer followed by testimonies. Some of them who'd been won into the Christian life was coaxed into saying a few words, which seemed to be very sweet and pleasant to the others.

Then their pastor—my nephew-in-law—done a little exhorting. And he asked the congregation to bow their heads while the choir sung a piece alone. 'Twas all about ninety and nine safe sheltered sheep and about another, what had been one of 'em, but had got wandered off and lost onto the "mountains wild and bare, away from the tender Shepherd's care."

Then the singers told us—very soft-like, as soft as a mother hushes her baby to sleep—how deep the waters was and how dark the night was, too, through which He went a-seeking the one who was "sick

and helpless and ready to die." And the pastor lovingly begged of them who hadn't yet give their hearts to God to lift up their hands.

A few done so.

It was solemn, very. It was too solemn. It was like a funeral—like a good many funerals crowded into one great, big funeral—'stead of being the glad, sweet thing it ought to be to get found and brought in out of the cold and dark into the sunshine and warmth of peace and forgiveness. To leave off hunting after what don't and can't satisfy, and be found yourself by the only One whose love can make life so full and sweet that trials begin to lose their sting, and the bitterness of heart-stabs is blunted.

The meetings has been going on for a good spell—five weeks or thereabouts, now—and sixty-seven souls has been won into the Church. Most of them are children out of the Sunday-school. They come in little huddles, with tender hearts.

Some of them are folks that has got to be so old that the world—deceitful as it is—don't dare to promise much to them. A few sweet young girls has come too, and four or five young men. Perhaps, without knowing it, they come because the girls did. I don't blame 'em. Why shouldn't they?

But there is hardly any regular-built, go-ahead business men, of the kind that keeps the world a-moving with their energy and push.

All of these here five weeks a-working and a-praying and a-singing and a-weeping of a hull church for sixty-seven souls! Not but what I know all the Bible has to say about the worth of one soul. And not but what I feel that the poorest is of more value than all the stars of Heaven would be if they was strung into one long, shining string.

But, though I kept saying over to myself, "Sixty-seven safe! Sixty-seven safe!" I couldn't keep from thinking onto



all the others what is a keeping on staying out in the dark and a-going on in the cold ; till, somehow, the sixty-seven didn't 'pear to comfort me as much as they'd ought to a done.

Christ spoke, in the parable, as if there wasn't only a hundred sheep in the hull world. And as if ninety-and-nine of 'em was all safe. And as if only one of 'em was lost. And He pictured the Shepherd as leaving all of them safe ones and not feeling satisfied till He'd come back with that *one lost sheep in His arms !*

Somehow, things seem to be all turned 'round, nowadays. There seems to be a lot of ninety-and-nines ; but they're out into the darkness ; and there's only a few *ones*, as you might say, and they're into the fold.

When we got home that night, John Wesley Gray, the pastor, asked me to come into the study for a little old-fashioned visit. I began to make an excuse, but Martha Ann whispered into my ear :

"Jest you go right along in. Don't go to doin' any more Mosesin'. I'll bring you both a good hot bowl o' ginger tea. It's warmin' to the stummick."

So I shut my hands tight and went in. And some way, t'wan't no time afore I'd told him everything that I'd been writing to you, of all that's been moving into my mind since I've been going to his new city meeting-house. And when I'd got all through and was beginning to get scairt to death at what I'd done, he just leant over and put his head onto his hands.

"I've felt it myself all along." He said it as if he was a-carrying of a tremendous load. And I've talked to my Official Board about it. But they want to keep to the old paths of Methodism. They are afraid of being swept away into formalism. So, they hold me down to the old methods. I would prefer to have these extra services during Lent, when the whole of Christendom, devoutly or other-



wise, turns its thoughts toward the religious life. But they think that would be losing their denominational individuality; and *that* must be maintained at any cost. As if it made any difference to the great Head of the Church!"

Martha Ann come in just then with two steaming bowls of ginger tea. And, as he looked up at her—inquirin' like, because he always likes to hear what he calls her "crisp opinions," she spoke right up and said, says she:

"'Pears to me that you an' your Church is a-undertakin' of too much. The Church 'dorter 'dapt itself to the needs of the people, ef it expects to draw 'em to it. Stid o' that, it's a-tryin' to 'dapt the people to the Church. Them ole paths you spoke of, is very good. But, somehow, it don't 'pear to me 's ef we'd got to go generations back'ards in order to walk into them paths.

"They come a-stretchin' right up into the present. An' they'll go a reachin'

clean through all the future. What we've got to do is to hunt them paths up, 'git into 'em an' go trampin' straight forreds a-doin' of our very best. An' the paths 'll change 'cordin' to the times. You won't find no ole corduroy roads a-runnin' through New York City.

"How much sense would there be in your insistin' onto preachin' off un a tombstone, jes' cause John Wesley preached off'n his father's tombstone arter them Church o' England folks wouldn't let him preach into their meeting-housen any more. An' it looks jes' the same to me when you set up to insist on folkses going forreds an' bein' prayed fur now, jest like they used ter do when they was livin' in log housen, an' meetin's was held into barns, an' school-housen, an' folks lived miles away from each other, an' couldn't git together often, an' needed jest that pertickerler kind o' spiritual help.

"The Salvation Army is a-doin' of

that pertickeler kind of religious business now, an' a-doin' of it 'mong the folks what kin be teched by it, an', mebbe, can't be teched by anything else. An' when the Salvation Army raised theirselves up an' went into that way of doin' things, they took it off'n *your* shoulders. You're left to do good, sound, sober, reasonable kind of work.

"Them as comes into meetin' housen nowadays, is reasonin' folks. Them as jest wants to be moved in their feelin's can go to the meetin's of the Army folks. The Church 'dorter encourage thinkin'. I hearn a man say, yisterday, in the street-car—he was talkin', quiet-like, to a friend, but I couldn't help a-hearin' of what he said, bein' set 'long side of him—'The Church,' says he, 'is a tryin' to blindfold men and to keep them from investigation. What has the Church got to be afraid of, ef she's all she claims to be?'

"An' I thought, right away, about that time when Nicodemus come to Christ.

An' how't Christ let him set down an' talk to Him, jest like a friend. Christ didn't go an' call up the disciples an' set them to prayin' over Nicodemus. An' He didn't git no folks a-singin' of things that ud make him cry. He jest set up, 'way inter the night a-answering of Nicodemuse's questions—Jesus did. None of your tryin' to make feelin' do the work of thinkin' in *that* meetin'!

“An' when the learned ruler of the Jews went to pryin' too clost into spiritual things, an' a makin' of 'em too much like the things what you buys an' sells in the market, I kin jest shet my eyes, now an' hear them words—spoke so gentle, but 'sef 'twas a king what said 'em—‘The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth.’

“Ef the church wouldn't try to tickle folkses feelin's, but would talk straight up and down reason to 'em, 'twould 'peal

to some what hain't never paid much 'tention. Some men, an' women, too, who wouldn't be seen a-cryin' fur the hull world, would set right down an' talk, reasonable, 'bout religious things. Some of 'em would admire to do it. They'd feel that they was bein' treated with proper respecck fur their intelleck.

"'Pears to me that when things has been tried an' tried without bringin' round anything like what the tryin' is *fur*, that it's about time to hunt up some other way o' doin'. Wa'n't it th' 'postle Paul what said that he was all things to all men, if by chance he might win some?"

I'd been noticin' that John Wesley'd been getting paler and paler while Martha Ann was talking. Just then, he undertook to get up, and swung 'round, instid, and fell onto the floor. Martha Ann sprung and straightened him out and undid his cravat.

"I'm dretful sorry," she said. "But

don't you go to worriting, Miss Hopkins. He'll come round in no time. All of this meetin' work has got his system out o' kilter. 'Tain't to be wondered at, nuther. Jest you bring me that bottle of camphire off'n the mantle-piece in your bedroom. Revival meetin's is worritin' 'nough to floor a bigger man 'n he is."

'Twas over in a few minutes, and John Wesley Gray laughed away my fears. "Something else must be done," he said, a-thinking of the church and not of him-himself. "My eyes have been opening slowly for some time. The thing to do now is to look in the right direction."

What with Martha Ann a-stirring of me up, and with a preacher a-fainting away at my very feet, things look pretty well mixed up. It appears to me that I shan't never git through with my ponderings.

CHAPTER XVI

Aunt Elvira Finds a new Plan
for Adding to the Church
which is Acted Upon with
Certain Results

WELL, after that last experience, I had ruther a bad turn. And, while I was setting 'round doing nothing, I had time to think that the 'Rithmetic of Life had got some real hard sums crowded into it.

Laying awake nights to ponder didn't seem to shed the least light onto the way of doing this pertickerler sum that, through my own foolishness—bein' so set on by Martha Ann—had got wrote out onto my slate for me to work out.

It seemed jest like it use ter in the

yellow school-house at Tompkins Corners, when I'd set and nibble my slate pencil, an' make little marks all 'round, and write my name over and over, and take my sponge and wipe it all out again, without finding out whether I'd ought to divide or multiply, or subtract, or just plain add.

Nothing seemed to come plain. No matter how steady I set gazing onto that slate. And there wasn't any big, kind teacher a-coming 'round and a-helping of me this time.

I begun to think that there must be Greatest Common Divisors and Least Common Multiples and Integers and such like, into the doing of it. And, being of no account in fractions, it began to seem as if I'd never be able to figure my way out.

Jest at this very identical time I come onto a little piece into a church paper that I was a-looking over one day, that 'peared to meet the case exactly—kind of

a providential find, as you might say, of one of them "solutions" that use to be scattered 'round in the school 'Rithmetics. Leastways, that's what I thought then. And John Wesley he thought so, too. So did Ellen Maria. But Martha Ann, she didn't let on as to what her thinking was.

The piece which took such a hold onto my mind—and John Wesley's mind, too—was about getting of the whole world saved, and a-getting of it saved in short order.

It said—the piece did—that the Church was working too easy like. That it was too much engaged in the feeling of its own spiritual pulse and in coddling its own little sicknesses—leastways, that's what all the high-flown words meant—and that it should stop fussing over itself and go to work for others, and not feel satisfied until the whole world was took for Jesus.

Then it went on to say that if every

perfessing Christian would persuade only one person a year to come into the church or to be a Christian, which is the same thing; and if each new one would go on and do the same thing, that—even allowing for the natural increase in population—even then the whole world would be Christianized in twenty years!

It took my breath clean away. Twenty year! I begun to think over the ones I would try to win. First, there was Esther Hadden, who'd been so true to her old father and mother that her sweetheart had got tired of waiting, and had gone off and married another woman. Seemed to me 's ef nothing but the love of heaven could comfort her. I begun to think of how I'd send some more of Martha Ann's jellies 'round there, even if she didn't 'pear to 'preciate them, when we got back; and of how I'd tell her that she needn't bother 'bout the rent no more, 'cause that piece of property wasn't worth much to me, anyhow.

And, possible, with life made easier, she might lose the hard look that had never left her face since she hearn the bells ring for that wedding, ten long year ago. And perhaps she might be won to give her heart to Him whose love is unchanging and outlasts death itself.

And then I thought—well, no matter. It's easy to find names to work for when a body's heart is tender. And I felt that, even suppose the end of this life was to come for me before it had all been brung about—as, pretty likely, it would—I might possibly be let to come back sometimes, when some big, glad angel was a-coming on an errand of joy and peace, just to look on while the angel was a-doing of that errand, and see how sweet and beautiful it had all got to be when that happy time had arrove.

And then I told it out to Martha Ann. And she didn't believe it at all. She said it didn't look likely. That she wasn't

nothing at figures, but she knew enough to disbelieve that. Although she did allow that the man who wrote it had the right idea.

“Ef the church is the salt of the airth,” says she, “it ain’t a-doing of the work what it’s been set to, and a salting of the hull airth. It’s jest a-staying all by itself, in little private lumps, and a-admirin’ of its own pertickerler little shiny crystals. When I put a sprinkle o’ salt into a puddin’, I put it there ’cause I want it to work its way ’round so’s every single swaller of that hull puddin’ ’ll taste of it. I want every one of them little shiny crystals, that look so pretty in the sun, to jest forget all about their own good looks, and melt right up and go ’round a-seasoning an’ a savin’ of everything that’s in reach of ’em.

“I ain’t no preacher, nor bishop, nor nobody,” Martha Ann says, says she, “an’ I don’t know how the thing’s goin’ ter be done. But the man what wrote that piece

has got the right idee into his head. I wish to the lan'sakes some other folks would think of doing what he calls 'individooal work.'

"It's easy 'nuff to shift responsibility off onto the preacher; an' then to set by an' see him a-strugglin' with somethin' that's too big for one man to handle. Plenty of folks is willin' to go to meetin'; mighty willin' to talk, 'n pray, 'n mebbe, to cry a little when they're inside uv the meetin'. But they wont do a whimper o' work, outside, by theirselves.

"But I'm a-workin' of you up into a reg'lar stew, Miss Hopkins, an' that ain't no way to help you. Ef I only had some *yarrer*, now, out o' that bunch I dried last year an' hung in the northeast corner o' the attic, I could fix you up in no time. You're all out o' kilter with the noise an' commotion uv city livin'."

And, as she went down the stairs, I heard her saying to herself, says she: "You don't ketch me 'way from home

agin without some of that yarb into my satchel."

I set still a spell after she'd gone. Then I got up and went into the study, and showed the little piece that I'd been and cut out of the paper to John Wesley Gray.

He read it clean through, real careful. Then he looked into a book of church statistics and took a pencil and done some figgering. And as he figgered, and as the answers to his sums kept a-getting longer an' longer, his face begun to get brighter and brighter. Till, at last, he said:

"The man is right. It's a simple thing. The wonder is that it hasn't been thought of before. And it seems to be the least thing an earnest Christian can pledge himself to undertake. Perhaps we've found our way out of the difficulties that have been rising so high of late."

That night in the prayer-meeting, when the feeling was deep, and two or three sisters and one long-favored brother had

wept "over the waste places in Zion," and bemoaned the lack of zeal in the church, and sighed after the old paths of Israel, John Wesley got up.

His face was all glowing. He seemed like a doctor what had come to the friends of some dying person, and had brought a medicine that could not fail, noways.

And he said that he quite understood all the heart sorrow of which the last testimonies had been the expression. But that he believed light was ready to dawn. Then he read, out loud to the whole meeting, that same little piece that I've told you about. And, after reading of it, he set out to them, in real bright colors, with pretty words that 'peared taken out uv poetry, how beautiful and blessed everything would be when the world had been all redeemed to Christ.

"There will be no more oppression," says he. "No need of trades unions and such like, because the spirit pervading every place will make life easier and

brighter to every living soul. There will be no more disunited families, because all will be walking in the same direction.

“Every one of you has probably some dear friend whose welfare lies heavily upon your heart. Many of you have come to me with this burden. You have told me, in confidence, how earnestly you desire the salvation of your brother, your sister, your husband, son or friend. You have asked me to converse with these that I might help you to win them, not necessarily into this church, but into the number of those who are saved.

“Suppose, now, that each of you take the matter up seriously. Give this year to its accomplishment. Work, pray, speak, when occasion requires, to the person ; be silent when the time is not fitting ; but, with God’s help, pledge yourself to Him and your own heart that you will not rest satisfied until, with His help, the desired object is accomplished.”

He said a lot more that sounded real inspiring, but that is kind of evading when I try to write it out. And he pressed it home, loving and airnest, that every one of them had some serious thing to do.

And I set there a-expecting of seeing a spirit of real revival and rejoicing break out into that meeting. I don't think I'd a-been put out if some of them had hol-lered a little, a-anticipating of the final jubilee.

But if you'll believe it—I couldn't at first—there wa'n't no such glad responding to the appeal as I'd been led to expect by John Wesley's talking so glowing-like. There wasn't even an "Amen!" And somebody in the amen corner started up a regular "Hark-from-the-Tombs-a-Doleful-Sound" hymn after he had set down.

But John Wesley didn't 'pear to mind. On the way home he said that it was a very serious matter, and he was glad that

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and putting of them away. And it kind
of come over me that very minute that
maybe the day of jubilee was more than
twenty years away.

CHAPTER XVII

Martha Ann Gives Her Opinion as to the Value of Some Prayers

SINCE a-writing of that last letter I've been into quite a state of mind. And Martha Ann, she's been a-trying her very best to help me out by showing how sort of on-reasoning I was to go on a-expecting of much from other folks. But all of her doings and sayings only showed up to me—more clear and plain-like—that in some ways, the Church herself is her own biggest hindrance. She showed it out to me real plain—Martha Ann did. And, 'stead of being willing to stop a-worriting and just take things as they be, its kinder broke my heart and tooken the spirit all out of me, as you might say.

One day when we two had been a-setting real still for quite a spell—she a-mending stockings and I a-doing of some fancy work for the church fair—she spoke out, sudden-like, Martha Ann did, and says she :

“ I don't blame you. An' nobody what's got a heart into their body can't blame you for goin' an' buildin' air castles an' sech. Anybody's likely to git excited, ef he's interested into humanity at all, when he finds a piece printed out 'clear an' plain into a newspaper so's 'at everybody kin read it, what sez as how the hull world can be took by Christianity in jest twenty years' time.

“ Mebbe it's easy 'nuff to say a thing like that, but when the piece goes on to explain how the thing can be done, it's more interestin'. Seems 's ef every perfer-sin' Christian might set to an' bring jest one outsider a year into the fold, fur as long as twenty year, at least. An' it does seem 's ef all on them new ones what hev

been fetched in might begin an' do the same; an' all of 'em keep on a-doin' uv it, clean on down to the very end uv that twenty year, when the hull world would be took for Christ.

"An' John Wesley Gray, he wouldn't a been the airnest, interested pastor that he is ef he hadn't a felt, fur a minute, at least, a sort of heart lift when you went an' showed to him that piece what you cut out of the paper—'specially arter he'd been an' figgered it all out an' found that the sum would come true an' prove itself.

"I kin see him, now, a-readin' uv it; an' I kin hear his voice, all full o' feelin', a-askin' uv 'em to do a little real live work along with their prayin'.

"An' you felt the change what come over that thar meetin' while he was a-talkin'—you felt it jest ez bad ez I did. It's real pitiful, I know. But it's true ez th' Gospel, an' it can't be helped. I don't believe that some hull prayer meetin's would weigh very heavy if they was

hooked onto the steelyards in heaven, or laid onto the heavenly scales. I don't see how some folks dast to pray as they do. No, I don't.

"And you're a-gittin' into a state uv mind over it all, an' a-lookin' pale an' sort o' limp. An' it's a-worritin' uv me dretful."

But John Wesley Gray wasn't a bit discouraged. Leastways, he didn't show it if he was. He got out little letters in printed writing and sent them to every member of the church. I'll write out one of them, so that you can see how dignified and serious he took it.

Dear Friend—You are a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church of this city, and have taken upon yourself the solemn vows of discipleship. The Lord Jesus expects the best service that you can render. Individual work is the necessity of the hour. Are you, therefore, willing to pledge yourself to the utmost effort

toward bringing one soul to Christ during the next twelve months? If so, be kind enough to sign the inclosed, and return it as soon as convenient to one of the undersigned. Yours faithfully.

New York, Feb. 18, 1898.

And here was put the name of the pastor, of the Sunday School superintendent and the class leaders. And, somehow his airnest way of looking at the matter kind of set me up again, till it began to seem once more as if the end was pretty near in sight.

And he planned to have encouragement meetings for "them Oneses," as Martha Ann called them. The little letters was all sent out. Not a single member of the church was missed—rich or poor, high or low, young or old—every single body had a little letter sent to their own individual selves.

Then we set down and waited, as you might say, John Wesley, Ellen Maria—

his wife, and my favorite niece—and I. Martha Ann, well, she had to wait; but there wasn't any loving expectancy wove like gold and silver threads through any of her waiting. She's real shrewd, Martha Ann is. And I've often wished I was a little shrewder after I've been took in by some made-up tale of woe that's been told to me. And, then, again, I'm real glad that I ain't so shrewd. Suppose I do get fooled pretty often, and I do, why, there's the pleasure of thinking, at least for a little spell, that things are all right. And when they really do come out so, it's very comforting to a body's feelings.

"They are weighing the matter," said John Wesley one day after he'd been setting real still for a long time. He spoke it right out, as if we'd been talking about it. And we hadn't said a single word in two or three days. "It's a serious thing to promise," says he, "and I'm glad that they don't do it hastily."

Then he got up and went and put on

his overcoat and hat and went out to make some calls onto the church mission folk.

And after he'd went out Martha Ann turned her eyes after him and said: "Humph!"

That was all she said, every word. I think it would a-ben easier to a-bore if she'd said more. There's a good deal that's discouraging to a body in one of Martha Ann's "Humphs!" I didn't feel so comfortable and satisfied like after hearing of it. And I began to think that maybe the finding of that piece in the paper wasn't so very providential after all.

Somehow, waiting didn't seem so easy after that. Still, there wasn't nothing else to do. We had to wait till, finally, John Wesley spoke to one of his class leaders about it. And the class leader hemmed two or three times before he give an answer. And then he said, says he:

"I can talk easy enough in my class meeting when the members are all there. And, when each one has set down after

giving their testimony, it's got to be real easy for me to give a little exhortation to that particular one, or a little encouragement, as the case may be. But I can't take one person alone and talk to him. I hain't never had the face to do that special kind of work. You'll have to count me out. I'm sorry, but I'm not built that way, you know, and can't help it, though I've been a class leader for twenty odd years."

John Wesley must have felt that the man who couldn't speak loving and gentle to one person about Christ was hardly fit to stand up before a whole meeting and talk. But, if he did, he kept from saying of it. He's real peaceable. There ain't any stirring up of wrath in his ways and in his speakings.

The richest man in the church—some of them call him the Bishop, because he seems so to expect that everything will go as he wants it to go, from the preacher to the penny collection—he finally came

over to the parsonage and spoke to my nephew-in-law. And the summing up of what he said was, that it was all right to generalize, but that the people didn't like special things laid out for them to do. That, as for the pastor and the deaconesses, 'twas their business to go round doing such kind of work. But that outsiders would think that the church had gone stark staring mad if they all took to turning of themselves into evangelists.

John Wesley felt a sort of homesickness creep into his heart, and go winding its cold and clammy length all through it, as he tried to explain that it was not expected that they should work, except most quietly, with no fuss nor pretense.

But the church bishop shook his head serious like, and said that it might do in some little out-of-the-way mission, but that wasn't the thing for a church like theirs.

After he'd gone away, Martha Ann said to me: "Don't think I'm tickled,

'cause I ain't. I want things bettered just as bad as you do. But human natur is human natur, here as well as in Tompkins Corners. And you know that them what do the most work in the meetin's ain't them as does the most outside. It 'd orter be so, but it ain't."

Some more days went by. The church didn't seem at all leaning toward making hasty promises, such as John Wesley 'peared to be afraid that they would at first.

Still, there was a few bright spots. One poor woman brought her daughter to the study one day and with tears into both their eyes, they asked the pastor to add the girl's name onto the church record. And he done it most willing.

And a few children sent word about their Ones. And, one day, just as evening was a-setting in, we heard a boy's voice in the hall a-asking for the minister.

John Wesley went out ; and there stood a little fellow a-holding onto another little

fellow. And he smiled right up into John Wesley's face, and says he:

"He's Jimmy. He's my One. He's a square-dealin' feller. That's why I've brung him. And he said he'd come, 'cause he likes you. You buys his papers, an' you speaks kind to him, and Jimmy, he's a-going to hunt up a One, too."

John Wesley took them into his study and had some nice things to eat brought in to them. And he told them some stories. And after he'd let them go and had come back into the setting-room, he says, says he: "Into the byways and hedges."

That was all that he said. Martha Ann looked over at me, and there was tears into her sharp little gray eyes. And she made a great fuss a-wiping of her spectacles.

And here we are, just about where we was before. Pondering don't seem to do much good no more. Still, I can't seem to be able to stop a-doing of it.

CHAPTER XVIII

Martha Ann Expresses Some
Pretty Lively Convictions
Concerning the Renting of
Pews.—She Wonders as to
the Real Ownership of the
Lord's House, and Suggests
"The Church of the Pew-
Holder" as an Appropriate
Name for Some Places of
Worship

"I WAS kind o' hankerin' to set my
eyes onto 'Tompkins Corners agin,"
says Martha Ann, says she to me one
day, "till I got that letter from Melvina
Mellings yisterday. 'N sense readin' uv
that, I've been feelin' a heap more recon-
ciled about snippin' a few more weeks

off'n real life an' a-tackin' uv 'em onto our stayin' here."

I took off my specs and waited, 'cause the look onto Martha Ann's face showed that something real kind of interesting was likely to come. But I had to set quite a spell afore she opened her lips.

"'Twas kind o' bore in onto my mind when I fust read that letter," says she at last, "as how't I'd best not let on to you nothing 'bout it, till you'd got back, an' seen fur yourself how things is. An' then, agin, thinks I to myself, 'When a blow is a-comin', sartin sure, an' there hain't no way o' dodging it, *it's best to be prepared.*' A body may be sommat staggered, but they hain't near so apt to git a real knock-down ef they knows aforehand and kind o' braces theirselves agin it.

"'N ef you was to go back to Tompkins Corners to-morrer, a-expectin' uv findin' things in *statter quo*, you'd git a mighty set-back. An' I hain't a-takin' uv no

sech responsibility onto my shoulders.
Not ef I knows myself."

There was a clap-o'-doom tone into them words of Martha Ann's that set me all of a tremble. If this was the preparing, then what on earth must the blow be !

Perhaps there'd been a fire to Tompkins Corners, and all of my building-property had been swep' away. And the old house what I'd been born into (and my mother before me), and the garret where I played when a wee thing ; and the great, pleasant living-room where—after I'd growed up into a happy young girl—I use to set with *him* close beside me during them long winter evenings by the blazing chimbley fire, when the rest uv 'em didn't 'pear to see if his hand did use ter steal over and draw mine down, for a minute or two, from the long lambs'-wool stocking I was always a-knitting.

And the little trinkets he give to me!
And the one letter he wrote and brought to me, himself, just because he couldn't

somehow tell to me when we was together quite all that he wanted to. I come nigh onto bringing that letter and them trinkets with me to New York. But, what business has a maiden woman of my age got with such things stowed away into her satchels and reticules.

So, they was all swep' away. And I hadn't no home to—

Then Martha Ann, she set off a-talkin' once more.

“Your heart,” says she, “was so terrible sot onto this pertickerler thing.”

“Yes, it was,” thinks I, though not a-saying it—“silly or not, it was awful set.”

“An' you'd put your hand inter your pocket so liberal an' oncomplainin'! They'd orter a-had the decency to a-waited till you got back afore doin' of it. But seems they didn't. So I thought best to begin a-preparin' uv you for the wust!”

She stopped again, and leant back into her chair and waited. I seen from her

words that my property was safe. But I couldn't for the life of me make out what she was a-trying to get at. I begun to think that a body 'd best have less preparin'. Being prepared for bad news is most as uncomfortable as hearing of 'em.

"'Pears like some folks mostly goes forreds by goin' backerds," Martha Ann went on a-saying. "An' churches is mos'tly folks, arter all. We look onto the Church as being a Divine Instertootion. P'raps there is a sort uv kernel uv divine sperret into it. Most likely there is. Now that I think on it, of course there is.

"But the biggest part of the Church is jest nothin' but folks. An' folks is mostly mighty human—be they inside or be they outside uv the Church. An' *human* stands mostly for *selfish*—jest as narves does. Narvous folks gits their own way. An' them what owns up to bein' human, does it cause they wants to hev things fixed to suit their own selves.

"They hain't no use uv my talkin'

round Robin Hood's barn no longer. I may jest as well let the cat out of the bag to oncet. I never could let folks down easy-like."

She gave a little flirt to her cap-strings. "The *differkilty's* jest here. *Them church trustees has been an' gone an' rented the pews agin—all uv the best on 'em. An' they've left jist a string across the fur-back part, an' a few up inter the loft on-rented. Left 'em fur them as hain't got no money to pay fur the privilidge uv worshippin' the Lord in His own tabernickle.*"

I was took back. 'There w'an't no denyin' uv it. Next to losin' uv my childhood's home, this was the heaviest blow that could a-been struck at me out of Tompkins Corners. Next to my joy at being counted one of His own, had been my desire to make the House of the Lord free to all who could be won to come inside of its walls. And I'd doubled and trebled my subscription so as to bring it about.

"I couldn't never onderstand," Martha

Ann she went on a-saying, "where anybody gits the right to pick an' choose fur the best place into the church, an' then fur to go an' have their name printed onto it, like a door-plate, as some folks does.

"I kin onderstand that it's *real* kind uv comfortable—I've tried it and know—to hev allers the same cushioned corner ready fur a body's back, an' the same little stool ready to their feet, an' their own hymn and sam-books—with their names printed onto 'em in gold letters—a-waitin'.

"Mighty comfortable to go a-rustlin' up, out uv your easy week-day life, with your Sunday satin gown an' your best bunnit all brushed free from a single speck o' dust, an' a-givin' little pious nods 'round to the few other comfortable ones near, who're enjoyin' the same blessin'.

"But what about them what hain't come up out uv a 'easy week? Them who's struggled to git there out uv a week what's been crowded full o' trouble an' leetle

snarlin' bothers; an' into which, p'raps, a few tears has been a-droppin'? Them what needs the divine peace and stillness, an' sweetness, *an' the comfort, too*. Ef there is any outside thing that kin make them comfortable—any seat into God's house that'll help *them* to forgit the hardships o' life, they'd orter hev it.

"P'raps they've had crowded onto their minds all durin' the week, the difference there is atween them a-battlin' agin the stream an' some other folkses easy sailin'. An' when they come up into the Lord's House arter a little strength to bear their burdensome lot, the old difference a-twixt them and others is pressed in onto 'em harder'n ever.

"An' they begin to kinder feel that the church hain't nothin', arter all, but a kind o' Sunday club-house; an' they loses their faith an' their hold onto God's lovin' an' leadin' hand.

"You remember James Martin's wife—her as was Molly Doolittle, an' had a com-

fortable home, an' use ter be druv to church with her own father's team, till she went agin the fambly an' married herself to James, what was a real hard drinker, an', finally, went off in a fit o' *tremers*, an' things went from bad to wuss with Molly an' her children?

"Well, she tole me herself, Molly did, that she didn't so much mind the difference 'twixt her life an' that uv some other folkses, till she got inside uv the church onto a Sunday mornin', an' seen the betterance that money made fur some folks there.

"She knew, Molly did, that their hunderd dollars wa'n't no more in the sight uv the Lord than her widder's mite. But she was made to feel that a hunderd dollars cut a heap sight bigger figger into the eyes of the church trustees. That's why she stopped off a-goin' to church. An', sumhow, though I never let on to her, I couldn't blame her fur a-doin' uv it.

“ It 'pears that they had a pretty lively time to the church meetin', that was called to talk up the matter uv makin' the change. Melviny says that class-leader Green said that nobody went to a concert a-expectin' of settin' into a box-seat if they only paid fur the gallery. An' he didn't see why the meetin'-house wasn't the same.

“ An' Mary Ann Bardeen, she spoke right out an' tole him that she'd no objection to his hevin' uv the box-seat most uv the time; but that she did want a occasional chance at it. She said that when her rich cousin was up from Jersey, she'd a-been willin' to a-paid for a box-seat fur them two Sundays.

“ She thought—Mary Jane did—that ef they was a-goin' to put the church service onto a level with a concert, they orter give notices, an' hev the seats sold oncet a week. She'd a-been more'n willin' to a-stood in line an' a-took her chance with the rest uv 'em; an' to hev paid a

pretty considerable sum fur them thar two Sundays."

I hadn't nothin' to say. So I didn't say it. Martha Ann 'peared to have a good deal to say. And I just set still an' let her keep on a-sayin' uv it.

"An' we'd been an' got it all frescoated onto the walls into the vesterbule:

'SEATS FREE—WELCOME TO ALL!'

Just where anybody, in passin' by, could see the invitin' words a-standin' there in bright, glad-colored letters. I s'pose they've got the frescoaters to go an' wipe them words all out by this time.

"Melviny says as how that Sunday-school Superintendent Mortimer has got into his ole seat on the middle aisle agin, he has. You remember how kind o' crazy he's allers been over that one pertickerler seat in the sanctuary. An' how that oncet, when John Westfall—a real likely sort o' man, with a clean, decent fambly,

who'd had some money left to him, an' took his fust step to'ards advancing of hisself an' them by goin' an' hirin' a good pew into the church—you remember how that, through some mistake in Sunday-school Superintendent Mortimer's not havin' notified the pew-letters, they gave that pew to John Westfall, don't you? An' what a pretty row was kicked up by the superintendent! He didn't go to Sunday services for six weeks! An' the 'ficial board had to patch it up by gittin' John an' his fambly to set into another pew.

“Talk about a ‘whip o’ small cords’ being used into the temple! ‘Pears to *me* that one wouldn’t be much out o’ place in these here days.”

She stopped to take breath. And I says, says I, “Did Melviny say as how they come to—to doin’ of it?”

“Why, ‘cause they can’t git the money to run the church in no other way—so they say. Folks won’t pay reasonable

unless they gits summat as shows how much they pays. There's mighty few who love the Lord's service enough to pay as much's a good seat is wuth, an' then take their chance a-gittin' into it.

"Then the' was danger o' losin' the Stebbinses an' the Perkinses. They was a-talkin' uv goin' summers else. They didn't like bein' pew-tramps—a-goin' fust here an' then there, wherever they could git a chance. 'Cause the church really had bigger crowds than afore ; an' a body had to be on time ef he struck a fust-class middle-aisle seat.

"An' Square Granby said that he felt like a stranger into a strange land, when he didn't see the ole familiar faces 'round him. 'Twas real disturbin' to his sperrit to set next to—nobody didn't know who.

"So the change was brung about. An' I hope to the lan' sakes alive that they feel better. Though a sort uv curus thing happened the very next Sunday.

"You know *Mis'* Humble? An' how

thet she's tried to disbelieve in everything sence she had *that* trouble? Well, it 'pears that something happened to soften her heart. I believe that her run-away son, who she worshipped, had wrote a lov-in' letter to her all the way from Injy, sayin' as how't he was comin' back to ask her to forgive him fur breakin' uv all their hearts.

"An' *Mis'* Humble, she was that happy that she wanted to go into church an' kneel down an' whisper out her thanks fur this great joy that was comin'. So, the very next mornin', bein' Sunday, she put on her bunnit an' took her Bible, an' went over into the Methodist church an' walked up the aisle an' knelt down into the very forredest pew an' begun prayin' in her heart over the joy that was come into her life. When the usher—a new man what didn't know her—went up an' teched her shoulder and says, says he :

" '*This pew is rented, ma'am.*'

" *Mis'* Humble she looked at him an'

then got up, slow-like, an' took her Bible an' umberell an' walked straight down the aisle, past the usher, who was a-trying to show her into a unrented pew at the back, straight out uv the church door an' over into the Unitarian church across the road,—that church where they don't set so much store by the Lord Jesus, but where their seats is really free.

“Everybody was scairt nigh about to death. *Mis'* Humble is real desirable fur any church. An' to let her slip through their fingers that way was pretty bad policy. So, the leadin' members, an' the parson, they all called onto her durin' the week. An' they said that 'twas the fault of the new man. That he wouldn't a-done it ef he'd a-knowed *who she was* !

“But *Mis'* Humble jest said to them that they was only makin' uv the matter wuss by their excusin' uv it. That the poorest woman in all Tompkins Corners needed a chance to pray in the Lord's house jest as much as she did. An' that

she'd made up her mind to go to a church that was really like the great God—no respecter of pussons."

I didn't have nothing to say, I was that beat out and weak at the heart over what I'd hearn. And Martha Ann she didn't have nothing to say for quite a spell. She rocked back'ards and for'wards, and back'ards and forwards, real swift-like. Then she stopped all of a sudden, and says, says she :

"I've been mighty took with some of the names to the churches here. 'The Church of the Messiah,' 'The Church of the Redeemer,' an' sech like. But arter gittin' that letter uv Melviny's, an' readin' uv it, an' thinkin' uv my own beloved little place uv worship—'way off up into the little country village, it seems to me that 'stid uv it's bein' the House uv the Lord, it's got to be simply an' only 'The Church of the Pew-Holder.' "

And my own heart growed heavier. For, in visiting 'round 'mong them as

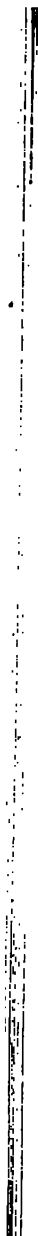
needs a comfortin' word occasional, an' a little money slipped into their hands on the sly, an' a few quiet unbeknownst things done for 'em oncet in a while, I'd found out how some of them hankered arter the church services, an' how glad they was when the seats was all free—no ushers an' nobody to pester 'em, 'less they wanted to be took to a seat. They could come in and go and set wheresomever they wanted to.

I thought of them, and was real sorry. It 'pears like as if I shall never get through having to ponder onto real hard and troublesome sums.

Your obedient servant,

ELVIRA HOPKINS.

From Tompkins Corners.



